

Knowsley

Fostering Services

finding families who care

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND
FAMILIES SERVICE**

FOSTERING POLICY 2010

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
DIVISION**

Knowsley 
Primary Care Trust


Knowsley Council

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1 Scope of the Policy of the Framework

1.1 This Fostering Policy outlines all aspects of Local Authority's duties and responsibilities in relation to the provision of foster care settings for Knowsley's children who are in public care.

1.2 The Fostering Service will undertake to recruit, assess, and train foster carers to meet the needs of the children requiring foster care placements, whether they require a permanent, long term, short term or respite foster care.

1.3 The Fostering Service will undertake to develop the skills of its foster carers and support, supervise and review all foster carers registered with the Council

1.4 The Fostering Service will also be staffed and managed by appropriately qualified and experienced staff and be supported by the Council, in achieving the best outcomes for children.

2 Introduction

2.1 Fostering may be defined as ...

The act of caring for a child or children by an adult/s who are not the birth parents, but who accept the responsibilities of the duties of care on behalf of the parents or those with parental responsibilities.

2.2 The fostering of children dates back as far as the Middle Ages. However, foster care in its modern context has changed over the years from a voluntary arrangement to one where the professional status of carers is recognised, promoted and regulated. These are Registered Foster Carers.

2.3 **The role and definition of the Registered Foster Carer** in the modern context is in line with the definition above but with specific focus on the care of **children in public care**. The care of children looked after is the prime focus of Knowsley's foster carers and therefore they may be defined as those who have been registered by the appropriate Knowsley Fostering Panel.

2.4 Children and young people who are in need of foster care will have been assessed by a professionally qualified and registered social worker. They may be:

- Children whose parent(s) are not able to care for them and request assistance from the Council, children and young people who require their welfare to be safeguarded and promoted and children who have been abandoned or have no parents living, (therefore have no person with parental responsibility), can be accommodated under s20 of the Children Act 1989.
- Children who have not received 'the care that it is reasonable to expect a parent to give' within their own family. These children may be subject to Interim Care Orders or Care Order pursuant to s31 or s38 of the Children Act 1989 or be accommodated by agreement with the parents, under s20 of the Children Act 1989.
- Children and families who require a respite break, or for whom regular short periods of accommodation will prevent family breakdown. These children will be accommodated, under s20 of the Children Act 1989, for the duration of their stay with foster carers.
- Children who have been abandoned or who have no living parent, therefore have no person who can exercise parental responsibility.

Site insert a hyperlink [Children Act](#)

3 The Legal Framework

3.1 The current legislative framework for the provision of accommodation for children by Local Authorities is contained in the Children Act 1989, Part 3 (Section 23). The regulatory framework for the provision of Foster Care Services is contained: in the Foster Service Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care 2002. Further standards are those set by the Children's Workforce Development Council 2005, in relation to the training and development of foster carers which need to be fully implemented in April 2008.

3.2 The Fostering Service in Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council is managed in accordance with these Standards and Regulations and will have a Statement of Purpose, which will be reviewed on a regular basis.

3.3 In addition, there are other pieces of legislation that impact on the provision of foster care services:

- a. The Human Rights Act 2000 has the effect of making the European Convention on Human Rights enforceable in English courts. This legislation will have an impact on fostering practice and processes, particularly in the area of:

'The Right to Family Life'.

The Local Authority will endeavour to provide sufficient and appropriate foster carers to meet the needs of the children of the Borough who cannot live within their own family.

Furthermore, there is a requirement for the preservation of contact and the child's history, heritage, birth forename and surname. Therefore all staff of the Department and its foster carers will; respect, encouraged and valued a children's racial, cultural and family heritage and sexual identity.

The Department's processes will be fair, equitable and transparent in all aspects of recruitment, assessment, training, support and review of foster carers.

- b. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 imposes duties and responsibilities on the Council for "eligible and relevant" young adults who have been looked after which includes those young people who are living in foster care. Specialist staff of the Children's Services will support fostered young people as they grow to become young adults.
 - c. The Children Act 2004 gives Local Authorities Children's Services focus on the life chances of all children, but gives a significant priority to the needs of
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looked after children. This Act created the Children's Commissioner and Directors of Children's Services and makes multi-service planning a necessity.

This legislation gives a statutory framework for 'Working Together' and allows and expects budget pooling across Children's Services such as Education, Health and Social Care. The Act also creates a new framework for Inspections against the five outcomes for children:-

- **being healthy;**
- **staying safe;**
- **enjoying and achieving;**
- **making a positive contribution; and,**
- **economic well-being**

- d. The White Paper "Care Matters, A Time For Change" highlights the educational needs of children looked after and in particular the support to be offered to in foster care. It provides advice about support post 18 years and into adulthood where appropriate if the young person's plan is to remain in their foster carer's home post 18 years.

3.4 Knowsley's Fostering Policies and Procedures are informed by Legislation and Guidance and will be reviewed and amended in line with national developments and legislative changes as they occur.

3.5 This policy will be complementary with other relevant policies of the Council. In particular: The Private Fostering Policy, The Equality and Diversity Policy, The Adoption Policy The Permanence Planning Policy, Special Guardianship Policy. [Site insert a hyperlink](#)

4. Underpinning Philosophy and Principles

4.1 The work of Knowsley's Fostering Service will be underpinned by the following philosophies and principles:

- **The welfare need of the child is paramount.** All work within the Fostering process is guided the Children Act 1989 principles, that child's welfare is paramount and voice of child will be heard in placement choice.
 - **The Fostering Service will operate within the context of services to support families to look after their children.** The Children's and Families Division will make all efforts possible to support families in safe caring for their children or in identifying permanent placements within the child's wider family.
 - **Fostering is seen as a positive option** for children of any age whose need for temporary or permanent care cannot be met within their own birth family or through adoption. We will seek to recruit carers who will provide a range of placement choice to meet the diverse/individual needs of children.
 - **Recognising Diversity.** Fostering Services are managed and delivered with due regard to the tailoring of services to meet the needs of individuals. Crucially, the issues of race, religion, culture, language, gender, marital status, sexual orientation and disability will not prejudice the work and outcomes within the fostering process.
 - **Recognising the importance of identity.** Fostering does not change a child's history. Full information will be made available to foster carers and to children, as appropriate, to enable them to know and understand what has happened in their lives prior to and throughout the time they are fostered. Children's birth names will not be altered without consent of all parties with parental responsibility or by the Court.
 - **Openness and honesty** will inform all work and activities within the fostering process.
 - **Meeting the needs of all participants in fostering.** The needs of the child, birth parents, birth relatives and fostering families are respected by the professional staff of the Children's and Families Division.
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- **Working in partnership** is fundamental to the work undertaken by Children's and Families Division with children, birth families, foster carers and other partner agencies
- **Fostering support and services.** All foster carers will have access to individual support/supervision through a nominated supervising social worker from the Fostering Team. Foster carers will have access to regular training and development opportunities in line with the Children's Workforce Development standards.

Foster carers will have the opportunity to progress through a career structure related to their training and experience. A mentoring system will also be available to provide further support.

Foster carers will receive further support in line with the child's care plan to ensure they are able to meet their identified needs. This will be coordinated by the child's allocated social worker in partnership with the supervising social worker.

- **Matching children to carers.** Matching children's needs and that wishes and feelings to carers' abilities is a complex process. Foster placements will be sought in the first instance from approved Knowsley carers and only if appropriate from other fostering agencies. The wishes and feelings of all parties will be considered and recorded in the planning and matching process.
 - **Meeting the needs of sibling groups.** The Children's and Families Division recognises the importance of maintaining contact between looked after children, and their brothers and sisters. Decisions to separate sibling groups on a permanent basis will be scrutinised at the appropriate Knowsley Panel and by the Agency Decision Maker.
 - **Contact and Fostering.** All children looked after by the Authority will have regular care planning meetings and these will give consideration to the positive benefits for the child to have contact with birth parents and/or birth relatives and if so, will consider the nature and frequency of contact and endeavour to facilitate such arrangements. All Knowsley foster carers will promote and support contact in accordance with the placed child's care plan.
 - **Disruption.** Where a matched permanent placement is in danger of disrupting a meeting of all relevant parties will undertake to identify if the placement can be supported. When a matched placement breaks down a Disruption Meeting will be convened.
 - **Complaints by and against Foster Carers.** The Children's and Families Division complaints system is open to all foster carers
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and information about how they can access this is referred to in training and in the Foster Carer Manual. Complaints against foster carers will be investigated by the fostering social worker and the child's social worker, except where the complaint is in relation to abuse allegations; these will be investigated within the Safeguarding Board's Professional Allegations Management . Were a foster carer has a complaint about the service or an allegation is made, the carer should be advised to seek independent support. Knowsley Fostering Service has a designated independent support worker.

- **Quality services.** The Fostering Services provided to meet the needs of all aspects of Fostering in Knowsley will be inspected against the five outcomes of the Children Act 2004 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care. The results of these inspections will be embraced and utilised to ensure the quality of services provided. Furthermore the practice of the Fostering Service will be quality assured on an individual basis within the independent reviews of carers and children, Fostering Panel and Decision Maker's scrutiny and periodic Reports to Elected Members.

5 A Managed Service

5.1 Knowsley's Elected Members will receive regular reports including the reports of Inspections to inform them and enable them to undertake their corporate duties and responsibilities. The Elected Member who holds the Portfolio for DCFS will have direct input in to the Fostering Service through membership of the Fostering Panel.

5.2 The Knowsley Fostering Panel Decision Maker will be the Operational Manager of the Department for Children and Families Service., thus enabling the work of the Service to be scrutinised and developed at an appropriate managerial level.

5.3 The Registered Manager of the Fostering Service will, have a clear job description, hold the relevant professional and managerial qualifications and appropriate levels of experience to undertake the functions of the role. The suitability to undertake this management role will be evidenced and appropriate checks are made (Sec2 (7)) Fostering Services Regulations 2002). There will be an appropriately qualified and experienced deputy/ Senior Practitioner to exercise the management functions in the manager's absence.

5.4 The Service has a Statement of Purpose which is approved by Elected Members and which demonstrates:

- That services are provided to children who are placed with Knowsley's foster carers;
- The Aims and Objectives of the Service;
- Its management structure
- Numbers and relevant qualifications of staff of the Service
- Numbers of foster carers and children placed
- How to complain
- Information about recruitment, approving, training, supporting, supervising and reviewing carers.

5.5 The Statement of Purpose is reviewed annually and amended appropriately. The statement is available to all foster carers and those who have a stake in fostering including; Elected Members, managers and staff of the Borough, prospective carers, parents and families of children looked after and members of the Knowsley Community.

5.6 All the social workers in the Service are qualified and registered with the General Social Work Council. All professional and ancillary staff have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks.

5.7 All staff in the Fostering Service will have regular support and guidance through formal and informal supervision and have their performance reviewed and development supported in line with the Borough's over arching Human Resources

policies. All staff of the Service can access information regarding employment policies through the Borough's Intranet Service. [insert hyperlink](#)

6. The Recruitment, Assessment, Induction and Approval of Foster Carers

6.1 The Fostering Service will periodically analyse the demand for placements and this information will form part of the overall recruitment strategy and to inform recruitment campaigns within the Borough. Campaigns will be managed through the structure of delegation.

6.2 Wherever possible, carers will be recruited from within the Borough or close to its boundaries, to enable our children to remain in close touch with relatives and friends and where possible, prevent changes in schools. Therefore local press and radio and local advertising by use of banners, are seen as good use of resources for recruitment.

6.3 The different types of carers which are approved by the Fostering Service are:

Permanence Foster Carers
Short-Term Foster carers
Long-term Foster carers
Respite Carers

6.4 Any or all of these types of carers maybe General carers for children to whom they are not related or Family and Friends Carers for specific children with whom the carers already have a family relationship.

6.5 People interested in fostering can easily gain information about the processes of approval from the Knowsley MBC Web-[Site insert a hyperlink](#), information leaflets in public places e.g. Libraries, or by contacting the Fostering Service by personal call or e-mail. All applicants will be treated with dignity and respect by staff being courteous, helpful and professional at all times.

6.6 Criteria for Accepting Applications from Prospective Foster Carers.

In accepting applications to be approved as prospective foster carers the Knowsley Fostering Service will apply the following criteria:-

- Knowsley operates an equal opportunities policy and no individual or couple, will be refused consideration as foster carers solely on the grounds of marital status, health, age, gender or sexual orientation, race, colour or nationality, religion, financial status or disability.
 - There is no legal requirement in respect of an applicant's age. However applicants will need to demonstrate that they can meet the needs of any child placed. It is anticipated that foster carers will retire at the national retirement age.
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- Applications will not be accepted from any person who has been convicted or cautioned for an offence against a child or a “specified offence” in accordance with Schedule 4 of the Foster Service Regulations 2002. Applicants convicted or cautioned for other offences can be considered at the discretion of the agency. The advice of the Fostering Panel may be sought during the assessment period. Any appeal against panel advice would be considered by a Senior manager
 - Applications will usually be considered from those who live within the Mersey Region. Applicants from outside of the Mersey Region may be considered where applicants can demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of children with specific placement needs.
 - Applicants living together as a partnership will be expected to demonstrate a stable relationship and will normally have been together for at least three years. In the event of a co-habiting partnership both applicants would be expected to jointly apply and complete all the assessment and induction process.
 - There is no expectation of applicants who are not parents to have undergone fertility investigations/treatment. However, applicants who have elected to undergo this treatment will be expected to have completed this to their own satisfaction.
 - Applicants will not be considered where they are currently accepted by another Agency. However, previous consideration or approval by another agency is not a bar to consideration.
 - Applicants will need to have of sound health and be physically fit and mentally fit, they are expected to disclose all relevant information relating to their personal medical histories. This would include any prognosis of life threatening illnesses occurring or reoccurring; any known genetic condition and any psychological and psychiatric referral or treatment concerning the applicants, a member of the household or immediate family.
 - In accordance with the recommendations made by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, this Agency wishes to provide a smoke free environment for children. Applicants who smoke will be advised of the significant health risks to children who are exposed to tobacco smoke.
Every effort will be made to place Knowsley children with foster carers who do not smoke and children aged 5 years and under will not be placed in smoking households. By 2010 no children under 10 years will be placed in smoking households.
Knowsley’s policy in respect of smoking will continue to be reviewed in the light of latest research and good practice and aims to become a totally non smoking service by 2012.
 - In respect of older children and those with significant relationships with prospective foster carers, the matching process will consider all factors on an individual basis.
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- Applicants will be required to demonstrate that their home and garden will provide a safe environment for a child.
- Where foster carers are employed, it is expected they will have satisfactory arrangements available to meet the child's needs at all times. It may be that another supporting family member can provide consistency of care. It is essential that applicants can demonstrate this and it will be a factor in assessment, training and approval.
- Applicants who currently own a dog subject to regulation under The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991) will be precluded from assessment and approval as foster carers. Applicants with other pets, who could pose a danger, should provide an assessment of any risk to the Service for its consideration.
- Applicants who work for the Knowsley Health and Social Wellbeing Department within the Children's Services Division will be advised to approach an alternative agency
- Applicants, who are involved with governance of Knowsley Council or its major partners, will also be advised to approach another fostering provider.

6.7 The process of becoming a foster carer may differ for **general foster carers** as opposed to **family and friends foster carers**. However, all aspects of the approval process must be completed by all carers.

6.8 Friends and Family Carers may, under certain conditions and by agreement with the Operational Manager, have a child or children placed with them in an emergency situation pursuant to **Regulation 38(2)**. In these circumstances the information to satisfy **Schedule 3 of the Regulations**, must be presented to the Fostering Panel within 6 weeks of placement.

6.9 Family and Friends foster carers, once given the status of registered foster carer, must then complete, within one year, the Induction phase of the Children's Workforce Development Council Standards, have a competency based assessment and attain their Certificate to practice as foster carers.

6.10 Family and Friends Carers who wish to be considered as foster carers for a looked after child who does not live with them, can be approved in the same manner as general carers. The National Fostering Standards will apply equally to these carers in that these standards must be met for approval to be given.

6.11 Family & Friends Carers who do not choose to take the fostering route will be given information about other ways they can care for their relatives and in some circumstances support and assistance can be given, provided they are assessed as being able to meet the children's needs.

6.12 General Foster Carer's approval is a two way process. Clear information is given to individuals and families who wish to foster, to enable them to consider whether they wish to proceed with the process towards approval. At the same time, the Fostering Service will begin the process of gathering information which will advise

on the applicant's suitability of to become foster carers. This is the information which will be presented to the Fostering Panel.

6.13 The assessment of a prospective foster carer's suitability for the task is a careful and comprehensive process involving:

- Information received from the application form in the recruitment pack which is given at the Open Evening
- The initial and comprehensive individual social work assessment
- Employment, personal and family references
- CRB, Health assessment and welfare checks
- Feedback from induction training
- Applicants can choose to attend Panel, adding to the information the Panel members have available to consider their recommendation.

6.14 Knowsley Fostering Services will embrace the Children's Workforce Development Standards and therefore all applicants who wish to become foster carers will be required to complete an induction training course and produce a portfolio of their learning and skills. The assessing social worker will complete a comprehensive written assessment of the applicants.

6.15 The applicants have the opportunity to read the completed assessment document and agree its content. The assessment will be presented to the Knowsley Fostering Panel on the BAAF Form F competency based assessment document, along with evidence of the statutory checks, references and a final visit from an independent manager from Children's and Families Division. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Decision Maker regarding the suitability of the applicants.

Private Fostering [Site insert a hyperlink](#)

6.16 Private fostering differs from the Friends and Family and general foster carers in that the children are placed with the carers by private agreement with their parents and the children are not Looked After by the Council.

6.17 The definition of Private Fostering is some one who is

- caring for a child under 16 years (18 if the child has a disability)
- who is not a close family member relative
- for a period in excess of 28 days
- at the request of the parent or person with parental responsibility

6.18 Any professional who becomes aware of such circumstances must invoke the Private Fostering Regulations, Policy and Procedure

7. The Fostering Panel- The Approval of Foster Carers

7.1 Knowsley Councils Adoption and Fostering Agency has two Panels; the Fostering Panel for the approval of all foster carers and the Adoption and Permanence Panel for the approval of adopters and matching in all permanence plans. The appropriate Panel will undertake the matching of children with their long term or permanent carers. Where decisions involving permanent changes in Parental Responsibility are concerned such matters will always be dealt with at the Adoption and Permanence Panel.

7.2 The Fostering Panel, the membership and constitution of which is determined by the Fostering Regulations 2002. The Panel will meet regularly, generally monthly, but in exceptional circumstances a special Panel will be arranged to prevent delay for specific children. Sufficient Panels will be arranged to meet the needs of Children's and Families Division.

7.3 There are 11 Panel members drawn from a range of different backgrounds and include people who have personal and professional experience of fostering. Panel membership should also demonstrate a balance of gender and reflect the cultural and racial character of the community it serves. Each Panel member can serve for a 3 year term and if desired, may serve for a repeat 3 year term. They may ultimately continue to serve a further term, but only after a one year break. An experienced and suitably qualified person with no direct responsibility for the management of the Service will bring independence to the role of the Chair of the Panel. A Vice Chair will be selected from the Panel members, the Vice Chair will not be a Manager of the Fostering Service.

7.4 The Panel will be supported by a professional adviser who is a Manager from the Fostering Service, a legal adviser from the Borough's Legal Services, (both none voting members) and a health advisor from the Area Health Authority, who is a voting member and a suitably qualified and experienced administrator/minute taker. Some Panel members will be independent of the agency and may be financially supported to attend Panel.

7.5 The Panel will not be able to make recommendations unless there are at least 5 Panel members in attendance, two of whom should be independent members. In the event the Panel is inquorate attempts should be made to reconvene quickly to prevent delays in plans. All independent and professional Panel members will declare any prior knowledge of an agenda item and a discussion will then be undertaken as to the part that member will play in the discussion and voting on the item.

7.6 All Panel members will be inducted into their role and have an annual appraisal in line with the Regulations. All members will also sign a Panel membership agreement

regarding a commitment to attendance and confidentiality in relation to information. The Agency will maintain an up to date record of all Panel members, with photograph, CRB check, and references taken up as to their suitability to serve as a Panel member. All Panel members will have an annual appraisal; these appraisals will be undertaken by the Panel Chair and professional advisor to the Panel.

7.7 The Fostering Service undertakes to provide a minimum of one annual training session for Panel members. Panel members will be consulted on the content and format of the training day. There is a clear expectation that Panel members will attend.

7.8 Functions of the Fostering Panel. The Fostering Panel business covers the following roles and responsibilities including:

- Make recommendations on the suitability of applicants to be approved as foster carers
- Make recommendations on the numbers, ages and genders of children the carers are suitable to care for.
- Make recommendations as to the suitability of matching for long term foster care arrangements
- Monitor the suitability of emergency (Regulation 38(2)) placements.
- Monitor the impact of exemptions in foster care placements
- Consider all foster carers initial review's and where appropriate ongoing reviews.
- Monitor issues in relation to the foster care population
- Recommend matters of de-registration of carers status
- Act as a consultative body to the department on fostering issues
- Offer advice on safeguarding issues which arise in individual foster care assessments
- Quality Assurance work presented
- Consider decisions of other Agency Panels within the Merseyside Consortium, in which the applicants may wish to appeal a decision made.

7.8 The Fostering Panel and Permanency through Fostering.

The Fostering Panel can be involved in decisions relating to placements of children for permanence through fostering by the approval of permanence foster carers .and the matching of children with permanence foster carers when they are sufficiently trained to undertake this role. They will in these circumstances consider:-

- Recommendations on plans for permanency through fostering as being in the best interest's of the child
 - Recommendations on the matching of carers and children
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7.9 These functions will also be undertaken at the Adoption and Permanency Panel. All matching for long term and permanence fostering will be based upon information in Form's E and F and matching report and the child's permanency report.

7.10 Conduct and Procedures of the Panel. Panel members will receive the Panel agenda and supporting information in sufficient time to allow appropriate consideration prior to the Panel date.

7.11 All Panel meetings are recorded with particular attention paid to the reasons for Panel Recommendations. Panel members will have the opportunity to agree or amend the Panel minutes. In situations where there is insufficient information to enable the Panel to make a recommendation, the Panel may request the agency to obtain other relevant information and may defer the item while this is undertaken.

7.12 Where there is an evenly divided Panel or a serious difference of opinion amongst Panel members, the Chair may ask for more information to be made available to the Panel before a recommendation is made. Where the Panel is not unanimous, dissent from the majority view and serious reservations expressed by individual Panel members about a particular recommendation, will be recorded in the Panel Minutes for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. Where applicants attend and make verbal representations to the Panel, these will also be noted in the minutes.

7.13 Panel members who have knowledge, either in a personal or a professional capacity, of a case under consideration, will declare an interest or inform the Chair of the Panel accordingly. It may be considered inappropriate for him/her to be present, join the discussion or vote on the item. The legal advisor or professional advisor's guidance may be useful in these circumstances.

7.14 Any person who is otherwise a member of the Panel, but who is presenting a case shall not be a voting member of the Panel throughout the discussion of that case. Declarations of interest will be recorded in the minutes of the Panel.

7.15 The presence of non-Panel members at Panel meetings could inhibit the proper working of a Panel; however it can be a useful induction for new prospective Panel members to attend two Panels before taking up their role. New Social Workers or other professionals may also find observing Panel to be a valuable training opportunity. The Professional Adviser to the Panel will agree when observers can attend Panel and for which items. No more than two observers will be permitted to attend any Panel meeting.

7.16 Recommendation of the Panel will be placed before the agency fostering Decision Maker with the Panel minutes and copies of all of the reports considered by the Panel on each Agenda item. The Decision Maker will record their view on the recommendation on a pro-forma document which will include the Panel's recommendation and the Decision Maker's views in support or rejection and reasons.

7.17 The Professional Adviser will also be available to the Decision Maker for consultation, if required. Where the Panel has provided the Agency with advice, the Decision Maker may express a view on this advice and in relation to prospective foster carers; this must be taken into account during the approval or any matching process.

7.18 The final decision in relation to any application will be made within 14 working days of the Panel meeting.

7.19 The decision is recorded and held on the appropriate case record. This will also include any view the Decision Maker has on the Panel's recommendation. If the Decision Maker is minded **not** to accept the Panel's recommendation they will discuss this with another senior person in the agency who is not a member of the Panel. The outcome of this discussion will be recorded on the appropriate case records.

7.20 Applicants will be verbally advised of the Panel recommendations and of the Decision. Written confirmation of the Agency's decision will be sent out to applicants, and in respect of a match, to a child's Parent/Guardians by the agency as appropriate. Letters to parents and guardians will be hand delivered by the child's social worker.

7.21 Where the Agency Decision Maker proposes **not to approve** the prospective foster carers they will be verbally advised followed by a formal letter advising them that the Agency has not found them as suitable to be a foster carers and the reasons for this decision. The letter will advise the prospective foster carers that they have 28 working days, starting with the date on which the notification is sent, to either accept the determination and withdraw their application, or make written representation to the agency to reconsider the application in the light of the written submission.

7.22 If representation is received within the 28 working day time limit, the Agency may decide to refer the case back to the Panel but it is not obliged to do so. If the agency does refer the case back to the Panel the prospective carers will be invited to attend the Panel and the Panel will make a fresh recommendation on their suitability.

7.23 Other complaints regarding the actions of the agency, its staff or procedures should be dealt with through the normal complaint procedure, or complaints can be forwarded to OFSTED, who inspect the Fostering Service.

7.24 Quality Assurance. The Panel has a role in monitoring fostering work in the Agency, which will contribute to the development of practice in the Agency. The Panel will keep abreast of the trends and initiatives locally and nationally and extend its experience and knowledge. The Agency will provide Panel training at least annually, jointly with the fostering team.

7.25 The activities of the Panel will be scrutinised internally by means of reports to Senior Managers and Elected Members of Knowsley bi-annually. The activities of the Panel will also be scrutinised externally by inspection of the service through OFSTED.

8. A Service to Meet Children's Needs

8.1 Access to Foster Carer Resources. A Request for foster placement will always be made within the Knowsley's Safeguarding duties and responsibilities or as part of a child protection plan or a Section 17 child in need plan. A request for a foster placement will be authorised by a Service Manager. When a child is placed in an emergency eg out of hours, the application will be considered in retrospect by the Service Manager with area responsibility.

8.2 Requests for placements must always be written, as this will provide vital initial information to the Service Manager responsible. It will also inform the matching of children and carers and provide the carer with initial information regarding the needs of the child.

8.3 Knowsley's Fostering Service offer a diversity of placement types to meet the assessed needs of children looked after amongst which are;

- Emergency Foster Placements
- Short Term Foster Placements
- Respite Foster Placements
- Long Term Foster Placements
- Permanence Fostering Placements

8.4 Some or any of these types of foster carers may be Family and Friends Carers but the processes remain the same for all types of carers with the exception of emergency placements made pursuant to Regulation 38(2) of the Fostering Regulation 2002.

Emergency Foster Placements.

8.5 Emergency Foster Placements (Regulation 38(1), Fostering Services Regulations 2002) - where the immediate placement of a child is necessary and agreement has been given for a child to become looked after, a child may be placed in an emergency with any ***approved and registered foster*** carer for a 24 hour period.

8.6 The suitability of this emergency placement to meet the needs of the child must then be considered at the first available Panel. If this carer is outside Knowsley, the area in which the carer resides will be informed of the placement.

8.7 Emergency Foster Placements. Regulation 38(2) The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 - where the immediate placement of a child is necessary and agreement has been given for a child to become looked after, a child may be placed with a person who is **not** a foster parent after that person has been interviewed, their accommodation has been inspected and information has been obtained about them and other persons living in the household

8.8 This placement can continue for a period not exceeding six weeks, provided that:-

- The person is a relative or friend of the child;
- The person has made a written agreement with the Local Authority to carry out the duties specified in paragraph (3);
- The Local Authority is satisfied as to the provisions of regulation 33(a).

8.9 A designated Senior Manager of the Department will consider the appropriateness of these emergency placements pursuant to **Regulation 38(2)**, by considering the information contained on the request form/viability assessment CF58 and declarations regarding the health and character of the prospective carer and the needs of the child. Emergency Friend and Family carers will be expected to sign an undertaking in relation to the care of the child. The viability assessment will then be passed to the Fostering Service who will ensure the carers have been provided with information to (*Leaflet "Information for Relative Carers"*) in relation to their role and the future implications and options open to them in caring for the looked after child. All looked after procedures will follow in relation to the child.

8.10 If these emergency Friend and Family carers choose to continue to care for the children, they will also choose the route they wish to follow. Such carers may wish to take independent legal advice.

8.11 They may wish to become short term foster carers. In this situation, a Form F assessment will be completed along with appropriate statutory checks and references and this will be presented to the Fostering Panel for approval as carers for this specific child. Their registration will be as Friends and Family or Kinship Carers for the specific child or children, in the event the children's placement ends then the registration will also end..

8.12 Friends and Family or Kinship Carers, will then be expected to attend the first available training course for prospective carers and complete a Portfolio of evidence of their skills to foster. This will enable them to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Certificate, which is a requirement. They will also be required to maintain a training regime, in line with their Personal Development Plan. This will be monitored at their annual review and failure to attend training could lead to reconsideration of their fostering status.

8.13 If foster care is not the chosen route to provide care for the child beyond the Regulation 38 period, then close family members can care for a relative without the

need for looked after status. If agreement can be reached as to the arrangements with the relatives and parents which provide for the welfare and protection of the child, then this placement can be supported by Section 17 (The Children Act 1989) children in need provisions.

8.14 Other routes open to such emergency Friends and Family carers would be to secure the child in their care by means of a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order. Interim orders could be achieved in the short term and these orders could be supported by the agency, provided the welfare and protection of the child is secured.

8.15 The addition of other Orders may be considered by the Court to support these carers and children. If the Division is already involved through Children in Need provisions a Sec 7 report would be requested by the court and that report or the Guardian may recommend other orders, or the Judge of their own motion could make any order.

8.16 Short Term Foster Placements. Short term foster care may be as short as a few days or for a longer period until permanent plans are achieved. Short term foster carers are those carers who have been assessed as having the skills to care for children who require short periods of care. These carers will be trained to meet the needs of children who become looked after, or those whose plans for permanence are not yet fully formulated.

8.17 The matching process between a child and prospective foster carers is important for the success of the placement. Matching of children and carers, where possible to plan the placement, will be agreed at a planning meeting.

8.18 At the time of their approval, the age range and number of children they can care for will be defined, however, this may change over time depending on their own circumstances and changes of status will be considered at their annual review.

8.19 All short term foster carers, whether General Carers or Kinship Carers will have attained the Children's Workforce Development Council Certificate within one year of approval and will have a Personal Development Plan, which will be monitored at their annual review.

8.20 Short Breaks or Respite Foster Placements Short breaks or respite carers offer a regular break, usually a weekend, to children in need and their families. The Home from Home fostering scheme offers regular respite breaks to families of and children with a severe disability. The short breaks scheme offers the same to non disabled children who have been assessed as requiring this service as part of a child in need plan, Short breaks/Respite carers also offer a service to other carers to support placements.

8.21` The children who utilise respite/short break services will be planned for and reviewed in the same way as all looked after children. However the birth parents or

those with parental responsibility will remain central to the promotion of their health, education and well being of the children at all times.

8.22 All parents or carers who utilise these schemes will be advised on the timescales and possible impact on benefits.

8.23 Short breaks/Respite foster carers are those carers who have been assessed as having the skills to care for children who require regular short periods of care. These carers will be trained to meet the needs of children whose family/carers require some respite.

8.24 Specialist training will be provided for these carers where there are specific needs are apparent, however, all of these foster carers, whether General Carers or Kinship Carers will have attained the Children's Workforce Development Council Certificate within one year of approval and will have a Personal Development Plan which will be monitored at their annual review.

8.25 The matching process between a child and prospective foster carers is important for the success of the placement. Matching of children and carers, where possible, will be agreed at a planning meeting and monitored by the child's review.

8.26 Long Term Foster Placements. Long Term Foster Placements would be provided to children and young persons whose permanence plan may be Independence Living or to return home to the care of their parents when circumstances such as age and ability to be protected are resolved. In the interim however, there is a need for a significant number of years of care required before the permanence care plan can be achieved.

8.27 Long term foster carers are those carers who have been assessed as having the skills to care for children who require long periods of care. These carers will be trained to meet the needs of children and prepare them for their eventual permanency plans to be achieves.

8.28 These carers are more likely to care for teenagers and be able to promote their life skills and support higher degrees of home contact. These carers can provide a considerable level of stability for children looked after, who continue to have significant attachments to their family of origin.

8.29 All long term foster carers, whether General Carers or Kinship Carers will have attained the Children's Workforce Development Council Certificate within one year of approval and will have a Personal Development Plan which will be monitored at their annual review.

8.30 The matching process between a child and prospective foster carers is important for the success of the placement. Matching of these placements will be undertaken by the relevant Panel using the Form E for the child, which parents and existing carers will be encouraged to contribute to and the child's wishes and

feelings, where possible, will be ascertained in respect of any plan for long term fostering. This is a central principle within the Children Act, for consultation with children and young people regarding significant decisions that are made in their lives. In addition the Form F for the carer will be presented to the Panel along with appropriate matching information.

Permanence Fostering Placements. [Site insert a hyperlink](#) [Permanence Policy](#)

8.31 All children looked after will have their need for permanence considered, at their four month review the focus on permanence needs will be highlighted and the route to permanence will be considered at the appropriate permanence planning meetings.

8.32 Permanence in social care settings is defined as:-

“Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity”

8.33 Permanence foster placements are those placements where the plan is for the child to remain outside the family of origin throughout its childhood and into adulthood.

8.34 Permanence carers are those who have been matched and are committed to meet the needs of a child for this significant period of time. Children and young people who are likely to require this type of care are those who may have attachments to their family of origin, which makes adoption, as a route to permanence, unfeasible. They are likely to be children who need to form attachments to primary care givers, which will allow them to become supported, stable adults.

8.35 All children looked after, who are unable to return to the care of their parents on a permanent basis, will always have their need for permanency to be secured. A Permanency Planning Meeting will identify and agree the optimum plan for permanency and the time scales for work to be completed. The plan for the child's placement for permanency should be presented to the second statutory review of the child, i.e. within 4 months of the child being looked after.

8.36 All efforts will be made to find a suitable placement within the child's birth family or existing social networks. Research has shown that such placements have a high success rate in meeting children's needs. Such placements should always be secured through Court Orders, for example Residence Order, and Special Guardianship Orders to meet the legal requirements of security of placement. These placements will always be seen as a preferable option, provided the child's needs can be fully met by these carers and the match has been scrutinised at the appropriate Panel.

8.37 Where the assessed need is identified as permanence fostering as the most appropriate plan for a looked after child and the birth parents disagree, **permanent** fostering placements can only be undertaken if a child is subject to a legal status, which gives the Local Authority shared parental responsibility.

8.38 During Care Proceedings, a detailed Care Plan will be developed and presented to the Court. Permanence planning meetings will consider all options for permanence and agree the optimum route and time scales to meet Panel and Court dates preventing delay.

8.39 When the outcome of the Permanence Planning meeting is a for a permanent foster placement, the child's needs will to be drawn together in a BAAF Form E. Parents and existing carers will be encouraged to contribute to this document. The child's wishes and feelings, where possible, will be ascertained in respect of any plan for permanence fostering. This is a central principle within the legislation that their wishes and feelings be taken into account in decisions relating to them and these are recorded.

8.40 The Form E will be presented to the appropriate Panel, which will consider the plan, and make its recommendation regarding the 'best interest's' of the child being placed with permanent foster carers. The agency Decision Maker will ratify or not this recommendation and this will then become the Agency plan, that is, the child's care plan ratified as the local Authority plan. If there are ongoing proceedings it will not be acted upon until proceedings are completed, or the leave of the court is obtained.

8.41 Permanence through fostering does not allow for the child's name to be changed to that of the carer. The law states, in S37(7) of the Children Act, 1989 "that no person may cause a child who is subject to a Care Order, to be known by a new surname without either the written consent of every person with parental responsibility or leave of the court".

8.42 Permanence foster carers are those carers who have been assessed as having the skills to care for children who require a permanence substitute family, but for whom adoption is not the planned option. These carers will be trained to meet the needs of children and to accept them as a member of their family, into adulthood and beyond. These carers can provide a high degree of stability for children looked after who continue to have attachments to their family of origin and who will need to be supported in contact with their birth family on a periodic basis.

8.43 All permanent foster carers, whether General Carers or Kinship Carers will have attained the Children's Workforce Development Council Certificate within one year of approval and will have a Personal Development Plan which will be monitored at their annual review.

8.44 Matching for Permanency Fostering. The matching process between a child and prospective foster carers is important for the success of the placement. This is particularly important in prospective permanency placements.

8.45 For the matching process in permanency, detailed information is required regarding the carers. This will be available in the assessment report (Form F). It is necessary to know about each carer's background, their wishes and feelings, what they have to offer and what they hope to obtain through permanence fostering. It is also important to identify any difficulties they may experience with different types of children. The social worker who assesses the applicants for approval will, wherever possible, complete the matching considerations based on their knowledge of the approved foster cares and the original assessment (Form F) The matching considerations should be presented to the Panel in a written report.

8.46 Similarly, detailed information is required in respect of the child. A detailed assessment, Form E, is needed, which should not only include an explanation of the child's need for fostering, but the challenges and pleasures they will bring to a family. The child's wishes and feelings about the type of family they want, and a description of the type of family they are likely to do best with, should also be included.

8.47 The social worker for the child will complete the Form E and the matching considerations. At all levels of planning the children's individual needs in relation to ethnicity, faith, language and culture, will be identified in matching children with carers. If a suitable match cannot be found, carers who are appropriate in the majority of respects will be considered, rather than the child be allowed to drift in the "looked after" system.

8.48 Matching is a critical part of fostering and permanency work. All staff within the Children and Families Division will work in partnership to clarify and profile children's needs and to identify potential carers.

8.49 When the match is placed before the Panel, this recommendation is ratified by the Decision Maker. Detailed planning for the placement will begin, involving all appropriate parties. This is a very important stage as it is the point at which the permanence fostering plan becomes a reality and both the child and the prospective carers are brought together to consider a definite proposal for placement.

8.50 The prospective carers will be given as much detailed information about the child as possible, including the assessment (Form E.) This may include access to information from all agencies involved. Depending on their age and understanding, the child will receive careful counselling and detailed information about their prospective new family.

8.51 It is important that information is provided, in writing, for prospective carers and for the child (in an appropriate format). This enables detailed consideration over a period of time and does not rely on foster carers, children and young people having

only received verbal information, by the social workers involved. If necessary leave of the court should be sought to release reports prepared for Court to carers.

8.50 Detailed planning is required in relation to the process of introducing the child to the prospective family. Planning considerations will take into account the specific needs of the child and the needs of the prospective carers, together with the needs of any children in the carer's family. Introductions will be part of a clearly defined plan agreed by all parties and can be financially supported.

9 Contact in Fostering

9.1 The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority to maintain, where appropriate, contact between Looked after Children and their birth parents and families. The Act also states that the needs of the child are paramount; therefore whilst there are undoubtedly benefits for the birth family, it is the child's needs that plans for contact will be based upon.

9.2 Knowsley's fostering practice currently assumes that there will be contact between the birth family and the child's care plan will record how this will be achieved and any associated arrangements, supervision for example and where the contact will take place. Foster carers will accept and value the contribution that positive contact makes to children's lives and will promote contact and contribute to the discussions when plans are being made. The children's planning meetings and looked after review will monitor the suitability of levels of contact. Where the arrangements for contact are written into a court order, the court defined frequency and arrangements will become the Care Plan and will be reviewed in the children's statutory review.

9.3 The purpose of contact in fostering will depend upon the current objectives of the care plan. If rehabilitation is the plan then contact will be very frequent and may include overnight or longer stays. The contact will ensure identity and attachments needs are met, as well as provide assessment of the potential for success of the rehabilitation plan. If the child's plan is permanence through foster care, then the main objective is likely to meet the identity needs of the child.

9.4 Contact within fostering can take a wide range of forms; **Direct Contact** is where the child meets with birth parents or relatives on an agreed frequency. **Indirect Contact** is the exchange of letters, photographs and other information according to an agreed plan.

9.6 The appropriateness and levels of contact with birth parents and relatives will be a key decision within the care planning process. Factors such as timing and venue must be considered in the light of the child's best interest.

9.7 Short-Term Placements. Where high levels of contact are taking place, it will be a generally accepted principle, that,

- For babies and very young children, it is always better for the adults to travel, rather than the child, to a venue near to the child's placement.
 - For young children of school age; consideration needs to be given to the length of the child's day and whether contact after a school day gives the most positive opportunity for all parties to enjoy the time together. Discussions with school may bring a more flexible approach.
-

- For siblings who are separated, contact with each other in the respective foster homes is important, as well as contact with family.
- Children's lives should not be dominated by contact sessions; they also need quality in their lives and should have the opportunity to experience everyday family life and leisure opportunities.

9.7 Long-Term placements will have finalised care plans and may have court orders regarding the levels of contact, however it will be a generally accepted principle that,

- The frequency of contact will be influenced by the nature of the plan and the age of the child and attachments to the parents and family members
- The timing of such contact will allow the child to pursue normal leisure activities.
- Wherever possible and safe, contact in these circumstances should occur in settings that promote an ordinary experience for a child rather than a reliance on establishments such as Family Centre type settings.

9.8 Permanent placements will be made where the child requires a forever substitute family and therefore as a general guiding principle;

- Direct contact levels should be set at a maximum frequency of 6 times per years if the parent can support the placement. This will allow the child to recover from the emotional impact of even the most positive of contact visits.
- If the parent cannot actively support the placement, then direct contact should only be considered at a very minimum frequency of 2 to 3 times a year to allow the child not only to recover from the emotional impact of the visit, but also to prioritise the prominence of the substitute family. The Impact of contact even if it's positive may be unsettling for child. Hence ongoing assessment of the needs of the child is vital.
- Limited direct contact can be supported by indirect contact.
- Siblings separated in different placements, should always have a greater opportunity for direct contact.

9.9 All decisions regarding levels of contact in permanence placements need to be agreed by all parties or supported by an Order of the court. The importance of attachments in determining levels of contact in permanent placements should wherever possible be informed by assessment undertaken by a child psychologist.

9.10 The Fostering Service and its carers will positively and actively promote contact. Carers will offer support to facilitate, transport and supervise contact if possible and appropriate.

9.11 Contact between children and their families will be viewed as a positive aspect of a looked after child's life, unless the contact is clearly harmful. If there are grounds for concern, these will be considered and contact amended. In extreme circumstances contact should be terminated. Termination of contact is a legal process and the courts decide upon the matter, based on the needs of the child. A

'No Contact Order' (Section 34(4) of the Children Act 1989), will be applied for, where this is assessed to be in the child's best interest.

10 Recording

10.1 All activities of the Fostering Service will be recorded in accordance with council policy and 'Recording With Care' [Site insert a hyperlink](#). The first contact with prospective foster carers will be recorded on a carer's record and also a computer record will be created

10.2 Each stage of the process to approval will also be recorded. The record will end if the applicant withdraws from the process. The reason why they chose to withdraw will also be recorded electronically and in a paper file. Paper records of those initial contacts who have not been assessed will be destroyed after six years in line with the File Destruction guidance.

10.3 All statutory checks and references will be recorded and all assessment work will be retained on file, including rough notes. Panel recommendations and the Decision Maker's comments and/or agreement, will be recorded and held both electronically and on the paper file.

10.4 Each approved foster carer will have a case record held within the Fostering Service. On this record will be stored the original documentation concerning their interest in fostering: completed Form F; a record of all checks made regarding the applicants and all other members of the household over 16 years; the appropriate Panel decision; the signed Foster Carer agreement; all subsequent review documents; records of the carer's contacts with their supervising social workers and any other relevant correspondence.

10.5 A record of all foster carers training will be maintained. Foster carers will receive a Record of Achievement Card to maintain and update their own record of training.

10.6 Each carer will have a Personal Development Plan which will outline the expectations of the Fostering Service for each individual. This plan will vary depending on previous training, the type of carer, the ages of children cared for and whether the carer is a skills carer.

10.7 All foster carers will be provided with a diary at the beginning of each year. They are required to complete the diary, recording significant events such as appointments for health and dental checks, school events and core groups and reviews. They should also record any event that may be of importance to the child's safety or well being, or the management of the child's plans. Training will be provided on recording.

10.8 Carers will receive documents such as care plans, review documents, court orders where appropriate for children in their care they will store these documents safely and securely in their homes and return them to the child's social worker on the end of the placement. Foster carers will also complete Memory Books and have

Memory Boxes available for the children in their care these items will go with the child at the end of the placement.

10.9 Carers must carefully record any allegation of abuse, ill treatment or illegal activity made by a child or young person and report this immediately to the child's social worker so that it can be investigated in accordance with Knowsley's Safeguarding procedures.

10.10 Paper records of all registered foster carers will be scanned and archived on a regular basis and can therefore be retained as long as the children's records are held for 75 years.

10.11 In the event of a disaster, such as flood, fire or destruction of the paper record,. Electronic records will be available and are backed up and secured. In the event that the equipment at the team setting is destroyed the Fostering Service is insured through the Council's insurer and replacements can be arranged. The paper records are archived to CD-Rom a duplicate set is held in a centrally secured place away from the team and the scanned paper records are also stored away from the Team setting

10.12 All records held within the Fostering Service will be available to be accessed by the relevant individuals through the Access to Records Policy,

10.13 All records held within the Fostering Service will be subject to the file Children's and Families Division file auditing regime

11 The Reviewing of Foster Carers Registration

11.1 All foster carers registered with the Children's and Families Division, will have an annual review of their foster care status. Foster carers will always be required to attend their review and these reviews will be organised in a flexible manner, to ensure their attendance.

11.2 The reviews will be chaired by a person who is suitably knowledgeable and experienced to undertake such a task and is independent of the management of the Fostering Service. The Chair will also link to other areas of the Children's Services to advise and influence for example the review chair can be a member of the fostering pane, act in a consultation role for developments in the Fostering Service and act as a champion for fostering in their wider role.

11.3 The review will seek to re-assess the abilities of the carer and consider the continued status of the carer, through the documentation provided and discussion with the parties involved.

11.4 The Fostering Service social worker will produce a written report to the review containing an up to date assessment of the carer's evidenced abilities over the year. Health and CRB updates will be undertaken every two years and the review will check these are current.

11.5 The foster carers will also make a written contribution about their role as carers, their training, the support offered from the department and any needs they have as a carer, or changes they wish to make to their status.

11.6 The social worker for any child placed in the preceding year, will also provide a written report or be available to attend the review and a contribution from the child where appropriate, depending on age and circumstances will also be presented to the meeting.

11.7 The review meeting and the recommendations of the review will be recorded. The carer will be advised of the decision of the review, orally and in writing.

11.8 The review may consider a change in the terms of approval for the carer: numbers of children or age ranges, however, changes from types of care e.g. short term to permanent is the province of the Agency Panels

11.9 All first reviews will be presented to the next available fostering Panel for their consideration of the ongoing registration.

11.10 The Chair will provide a written report to the Fostering Panel on a quarterly basis giving them details of carers who have been reviewed with information regarding the level of contributions from other staff and outcomes. Furthermore, the

report will advise of any incidents where the Safeguarding procedures have been invoked over the quarter period and the outcome.

12 Fostering Support Services

12.1 The Knowsley Fostering Service will provide support and supervision to its foster carers. This process will ensure the carer's are able to meet the children's identified needs during placement, highlight training and development needs of the carers and if additional support is required. The level and types of support will depend on the individual carers and child's status and their needs. Children in fostering placements will be visited by their social worker, in line with statutory visiting requirements for children looked after, as a minimum.

12.2 The Knowsley Children's and Families Division staff will act, at all times, in partnership with the foster carers. They will consult and share information regarding the child looked after in their care. Foster carers will be invited, in good time to enable them to attend, all planning meetings and reviews for children in their care. At such meetings the foster carer's views will be treated with respect and recorded where required foster carers will be supported by a Fostering Service social worker.

12.3 Some fostering placements are high-risk placements. This may be because of the previous experiences of children. It is important to identify these placements and to prepare prospective carers as carefully as possible. Risk assessments will be prepared by the children's placing social worker a copy of this will be available to the Fostering Service and the carer, in order that the need for additional support can be assessed. High-risk placements should always be supported with a package of intervention to meet the child's identified needs and support carers in caring for the child.

12.4 All Knowsley's foster carers will receive Induction/Pre-Approval training and will have available to them, an annual training programme, specific to their needs as carers and recorded in their Personal Development Plan. Foster carers will also have access to relevant courses in the Children's and Families Division staff-training programme. Foster carers and employed staff training together is seen as beneficial and enhances the learning opportunities of both groups. Foster carer's training will be provided up to NVQ Level 3.

12.5 Every registered foster carer will have a supervising social worker from the Fostering Services who will be available to offer advice, and guidance.

12.6 The child or young person placed in their care will also have a social worker and they too can offer advice and guidance to the carers. Specialist workers from Health, Education and Therapeutic services will also be available to carers within the care planning arrangements for any child placed.

12.7 All foster carers will be provided with a Manual for general advice, regarding their role as carers.

12.8 Newly approved Foster Carers will have access to Mentors who will be experienced carers, to support them for at least in their first year of fostering.

12.9 The Out of Hours **Emergency Duty standby service** is available to all carers for advice or intervention out of office hours, 365 days per year outside office hours.

12.10 The Fostering Service and its carers will accept and value the diversity foster children bring. The children they care for will have a different history, heredity and heritage from the carer's family. Furthermore, regardless of any arrangements for contact, detailed records should be kept on the relevant files about the child's birth parents, siblings (if any) and wider family. Such information will help the child in the future to develop a clearer picture of her/his history and heredity. Foster carers will be provided with memory books and boxes to preserve and secure their experiences in foster care.

12.11 Knowsley's financial support to foster carers for the maintenance of the children in their care will be based on the National Minimum Fostering Care Rates (2006). These rates will be reviewed by the Local Authority and amended annually, in line with the cost of living. A Scheme is available to all carers who wish to become professional foster carers. This scheme includes an incremental professional fee. Details of the professional scheme and other ancillary payments are contained in the **'Skills Based Foster Care Payments Scheme'** [Site insert a hyperlink](#) and the **'Maintenance Payments through the Boarding Out Budget'** [Site insert a hyperlink](#) documents. Foster carers will be advised of the rates payable on an annual basis.

12.12 Support and advice will be given to all full time carers for children with a severe disability to enable them to claim the state benefits relating to the disability. This money is essentially the child's money and should be used accordingly. The carer's component of the Attendance Allowance can be used by the carer, to help them support the child. The remainder should be used to purchase items the boarding out payments do not cover, or put into savings in the child's name. The mobility component can be used to purchase a mobility car; however the car will belong to the child and will leave with them if the placement should end.

12.13 The Fostering Service will continue to financially support carers and young people who choose to remain in their foster carer's homes beyond 18 years. The amount to be agreed will be based upon the levels of dependency of the young person and the levels of support required. *(Further guidance regarding these payments is contained in the "Maintenance Payments through the Boarding Out Budget" Document)*

12.14 The Knowsley's Foster Care Association will be practically and financially supported in its role in supporting and representing the Borough's foster carers.

12.15 There is positive support to carers in whistle blowing actions in the Fostering Service, as in the Council as a whole, as this may protect children from abuse

12.16 Foster carers who are subject to investigation or complaint about their practice will not only be supported by the Fostering Service social workers but will have the

opportunity to given advice/ support from an independent worker. They will also have Independent Legal and Professional advice from Fostering Network, a National Agency of which the Service and all its foster carers are members

13. Outcomes for Children Looked After

13.1 Knowsley Council will undertake its corporate parenting duties towards all children and young people who are in public care with commitment and diligence.

“Corporate parenting, is the term used to describe the local authority and its partner’s duties and responsibilities to children and young people who are looked after. Its central principle is that the local authority and partners should parent looked after children much as one would parent their own child or children in their family.” (The Knowsley Corporate Parenting Strategy 2007-10 (p1)

13.2 Knowsley’s foster carers; The Fostering Service will support the five outcomes of the Children Act 2004 by affording all carers training in the importance of keeping children safe and meeting the health and education needs of the children. The Service will interface and liaise with specialist staff of the Council to assist meet the individual needs of carers and children.

13.3 The Fostering Service and carers will be given all available health information at the by the children’s social worker. The specialist, children looked after nurse will make available the information from initial health assessments to the carer and the Fostering Service. Foster carers will ensure children attend health appointments and promote good health by providing a healthy diet.

13.4 All foster carers are provided with information about the dangers related to cigarette smoking. They will be supported by the Fostering Service in smoking cessation because of the health risks to children in placement from passive smoke inhalation and by providing a positive role model. It is the intention that the Fostering Service will become totally non smoking by 2012.

13.5 The Fostering Service and carers will ensure children attend school punctually and they are expected to attend children’s school events including parents evening unless this is not though appropriate in accordance with the child’s best interests/wishes and feelings. They are also expected to take part in the production of the child’s Personal Education Plan and advise the child’s social worker of any education successes or problems. Foster carers will not take the children out of school for holidays, for example, except in exceptional circumstances, which will have been agreed with all parties.

13.6 The Fostering Service will support carers in ensuring that children and young people have positive leisure experiences and can learn to achieve and experiment with new activities. All carers will be supported to provide children in their care with holiday experiences, to provide a realistic amount of pocket money, have a bank account and learn the benefit of saving and handling money.

13.7 Children in public care are entitled to enjoy a childhood that provides fun and leisure with their friends. This includes the opportunity for ‘sleepovers’ and to accept friends’ invitations to stay at their house . A proper balance has to be maintained between allowing freedoms and opportunities essential to growing up and

safeguarding children to whom the Council has a duty of care. The guidance to carers outlines how that balance is to be achieved and is based on what an 'average' responsible parent would do with their own children.

13.8 Foster carers are therefore empowered to agree, that children aged seven and above who are placed in **long term** or in **permanent foster placements**, are permitted to stay for one or two nights with school and leisure friends. This is however subject to appropriate safeguards being maintained by the foster carer. The children's social worker's will advise the parent of this and the fact that their consent will **not necessarily** have to be sought. Wherever possible however, this should be included in the care plan which the parent is asked to sign.

13.9 The Fostering Service will support carers at **the ending of placements**. If this is in positive circumstances i.e., in line with the care plan, it will be a positive experience for carers and child. The ending of a placement should be marked by a small celebration or gift. All the toys, books and possessions acquired during the placement belong to the child and will be packed into suitable containers for leaving.

13.10 Not all placements end however according to plan. Where good matching between a carer's abilities and children's needs has not been achieved, placement breakdown is more likely. Some placements are known to be very high risk and the Fostering Service will offer additional support to such placements and will negotiate additional resources.

13.11 Where a permanent or long term placement disrupts or where a child has had three different foster placements in one year then a **disruption meeting** should be held. This meeting should be chaired by a person with some independence from the management of the case but with sufficient knowledge and experience to assist all parties to benefit from the meeting.

13.12 Where a permanency placement is in danger of disrupting, urgent discussions should take place, to assess if additional support to the placement will prevent the breakdown. The first priority in a disrupting placement must be to attempt to support the placement and prevent its disruption, if this is in the child's best interest. Priority for resources will be given to such children.

13.13 Where a looked after child experiences three placement changes in quick succession, an new assessment of their needs should be undertaken and presented in writing by the child's social worker and an review of the circumstances should be undertaken through **a Disruption Meeting** chaired by an alternative Principle Officer than would usually undertake the statutory review. The notes of this meeting should be presented to an appropriate management meeting

13.14 A Disruption Meeting will assist the Fostering Service in providing future placements for the child, bring closure for the child and carers and inform the future plans for the child and the ongoing Child Care planning process. The minutes of Disruption meetings will be shared with the appropriate individuals and the Panel

who recommended the matching for the placement to consider such issues identified for fostering and permanency.

13.15 It is important for the Senior Management Team regularly consider any factors, which are common within disruptions to assist with future planning and resource allocation.

13.16 The manager from the Quality Assurance Unit will monitor disruptions meetings of both categories and report to the Children's and Families Division, Management team on a bi-annually basis.

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14. Planning for and Review of the Fostering Service

14.1 The Fostering Service is planned and delivered within the Children's and Families Division. The overall guidance and development of the Fostering Services will be within legislation and National and Local Standards. The Service is independently inspected by OFSTED [Site insert a hyperlink](#) and the learning from these inspections will also drive the review of the Service.

14.2 There will be a cyclical approach to planning in the Fostering Service based on an annual analysis of the known and projected needs of the children requiring placements. This enables planned allocation of resources against agreed objectives and targets. The Fostering Service is a key priority within 'Every Child Matters' which aims to secure placement stability. The Service is also an integral part of the Children's Planning process.

14.3 Detailed statistical and management information is collected in a variety of ways regarding the Fostering Service. This will inform further strategic and operational planning, service delivery and resource requirements.

14.4 Complaints against foster carers will be recorded and collated by the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer and Registered Manager. Allegations of abuse by foster carers will be investigated within the Knowsley Safeguarding Procedures through the Allegations Management Procedures and will be collated within the Quality Assurance Unit and reported to Fostering Panel and Divisional Management Team and OFSTED where appropriate.

14.5 The Department encourages the dissemination of research findings in respect of fostering and permanency work. Research is actively used to underpin evidence-based practice.

14.6 The Children's and Families Division Will periodically review its arrangements for providing a comprehensive Fostering Service. This process involves reviewing the work undertaken and reviewing all written materials. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually and Policies will be updated regularly, along with procedures and practice guidance. These reviews will take account of any changes in legislation, regulations, guidance and standards and will culminate in a report to Senior Managers and Elected Members making recommendations for any changes which have emerged or are needed.

14.7 The Fostering Service will contribute to improving the outcomes for Children Looked After through the Children and Young Peoples Plan, Divisional Service Plan, Corporate Parenting Strategy Plans.

15 Providing a Quality Fostering Service:

15.1 Knowsley's Children's and Families Division are committed to providing a consistently high quality Fostering Service, aimed at meeting the needs of service users. The review of the Fostering Service outlined above, is an important element in ensuring a quality service.

15.2 The Children's and Families Division has clear structures for the management of staff and systems of accountability, for all those undertaking fostering work. These systems include staff supervision and the Children Looked After Planning and Review procedures. The Knowsley Panels will act as a quality assurance mechanism in that the members, Chairs and Professional Advisors will meet at regular intervals with the Decision Maker and provide feedback on standards. The Department is committed to a standardised approach to temporary and permanence fostering and the National Standards for Fostering form the framework for the service.

15.3 In order to effectively monitor performance against standards and criteria, the Department is committed to recording and collating detailed information about all aspects of the delivery of the Fostering Service. The Department also ensures that children, staff, parents and prospective foster carers are aware of the Complaints and Representations Procedures.

15.5 The annual Training Plan for Children's and Families Division will also include training needs in respect of the Fostering Service.

15.6 The Children's and Families Division recognises the importance of seeking user feedback on the Fostering Service. A variety of methods are used to obtain user views and levels of satisfaction with the Service, including the use of exit questionnaires and a computer programme to elicit children's views. User involvement in planning is recognised as very important and systems are being developed to enable involvement from all parties to the fostering process. The information gathered through Disruption Meetings is also analysed to identify any consistent factors, which have implications for policy, procedures, practice and recruitment and retention of foster carers.

15.7 Monitoring and evaluation of the Fostering Service needs to be undertaken in a wide variety of ways, most of which have been highlighted in this section of the Policy Statement. Fostering Panel members, Departmental staff, specialist advisors and Elected Members are all involved in a range of processes aimed at planning, monitoring and evaluating the Service.

16 Conclusions

16.1 Knowsley's Fostering Services will treat all parties in the fostering process with equal value and respect, recognising that all children require nurture in their lives and for some this will be achieved through Fostering.

16.2 The relationships between the carer and the child will require the ongoing support of all professionals of the Council, as the corporate parent, and in particular Children's and Families Division. The agenda for fostering is a complex and dynamic one, and the Fostering Service will structure and deliver the service in accordance with this evolutionary process to ensure that the Knowsley Fostering Services is able to continually respond to and meet the diverse needs of children for whom we are responsible.