**West Lothian Council**

**Fostering Service**

**Statement of Purpose**

**Contents**

**Introduction**

The statement of purpose is designed to inform you about the values, and structure of West Lothian Family Placement Service, providing relevant information regarding the recruitment, assessment, training and support of our foster carers; details of placements; and staffing and management structure.

**Legislation**

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995

The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001

The Adoption (Scotland) Act 2007

Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009

Children’s Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

National Care Standards (Foster Care and Family Placement Services)

**West Lothian Council**

West Lothian Council is a publicly accountable organisation. It is one of 32 Scottish unitary local authorities, serving a community of over 175,000 citizens in Central Scotland. West Lothian has 33 elected members (councillors) representing nine multi-member wards and are elected every 4 years.

**West Lothian Council Mission Statement**

**“*Striving for excellence…working with and for our communities”***

**West Lothian Council Values**

***We are striving for excellence in”***

* Focusing on our customers’ needs;
* Being honest, open and accountable;
* Providing equality of opportunities;
* Developing employees;
* Making best use of our resources; and
* Working in partnership.

**West Lothian Council Priorities**

* Improving attainment and positive destinations for school children;
* Delivering positive outcomes and early intervention for early years;
* Minimising poverty, the cycle of deprivation and promoting equality;
* Improving the quality of life for older people;
* Improving the employment position in West Lothian;
* Delivering positive outcomes on health; and
* Reducing crime and improving community safety.

**Status and Constitution of the Family Placement Service**

West Lothian Council is committed to the placement of our looked after and accommodated children with our own Foster Carers where possible, should they be unable to live with their birth parents or relatives.

The provision of a high quality, effective child centred in house Foster Care Service is a core objective in West Lothian Council’s strategy for improving outcomes to children and young people, ensuring where possible placement within our community.

All staff working within the Family Placement Service are employed by West Lothian Council and are appropriately qualified and training to undertake the various tasks and responsibilities associated with providing an effective Family Placement Service.

**West Lothian Council Family Placement Service Key Points**

Below are listed the key points which underpin the Family Placement Service:

* The Family Placement Service recognises that support, supervision and training of Foster Carers is essential in providing a safe, caring and transparent service to our children and young people;
* The Family Placement Service provides a professional and flexible service which keeps the child at the centre;
* The Family Placement Service strives to continuously improve its service;
* The Family Placement Service recognises the contributions of key stakeholders, including children, young people and Foster Carers in the development of the service.

**Aims and Objectives**

***To make a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children and young people in our care***

The needs, wishes and safety of children and young people in our care are at the centre of West Lothian Family Placement Service. We believe that all children and young people requiring care outside their immediate birth family have the right to live within a safe, supportive and nurturing family environment that meets their needs and enables them to realise their full potential. Above all children and young people should be listened to and their views acted upon.

**The Family Placement Service aim to:**

* Provide high quality care to all of our looked after children and young people through the provision of approved foster carers and approval of kinship carers who can offer a safe, nurturing and supportive environment;
* Foster carers and who are able to preserve and promote safe, strong relationships with children, young people, their families, their communities and any other important people, such as previous foster carers.
* Encourage and promote co-operation and partnership working between all of those involves in the care of a child or young people, in order to promote their best interests and to meet their needs in respect of physical and emotional welfare, health, education, identity, culture, ethnicity and religion;
* Recruit, assess, train, support and supervise a wide range of foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of children and young people requiring foster placements. This includes foster carers who provide short breaks, interim, long term and permanent placements.

**Family Placement Service Objectives**

* The provision of Family Based Care placements where every child ad young person benefit from stability and security in a safe, warm and nurturing environment;
* The careful matching of children and young people, giving consideration to their individual needs with the skills and experience of Foster Carers;
* To ensure that the cultural and diversity needs of looked after children and young people are adequately met;
* To ensure that all looked after children and young people’s physical and emotional health and wellbeing needs are met;
* To ensure that all looked after children and young people benefit from educational opportunities;
* To ensure that all looked after children and young people benefit from care that supports the development of their independent livings skills;
* To provide all looked after children and young people with a range of social and leisure opportunities and experiences;
* To promote contact with birth families and significant others, and facilitate this where necessary;
* A commitment to the provision of a quality service and its continuous improvement;
* A commitment to the development of the service through stakeholder participation and consultation;

**Fostering Placements**

As part of the National Foster Care Review, commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2013, all Local Authorities, Independent and Third Sector Fostering Agencies are required to use the same placement descriptors.

**Permanent:** A placement secured by a Permanence Order. For a child or young person this means that the care planning process has concluded and that they will thrive best if they are cared for away from home on a permanent basis. A Permanence Order, which is applied for by the local authority through the courts, can provide the child, their carer and the local authority with the legal security and stability.

**Long Term:** A placement which has been in place for longer than 24 months that is not secured by a Permanence Order (This should be an exceptional situation and an indication that the placement requires close scrutiny). Agencies must differentiate between long-term placements where:

* An Adoption Order is being sought;
* A Permanence Order with authority to adopt is being sought;
* A Permanence Order is being sought;
* Child’s Care Plan indicates that the placement will be maintained into adulthood (18+years of age) without a Permanence Order being sought;
* Child’s Care Plan indicates that alternative placements are being sought (including with birth family); or
* Child’s Care Plan gives no indication of the placement’s objective or expected duration and therefore requires close scrutiny.

**Interim:** A placement which has been in place for less than 24months, not secured by a Permanence Order. Agencies must differentiate between interim placements which are:

* Part of a concurrency plan;
* Working towards rehabilitation with birth parents or other carers (not part of a concurrency plan);
* Working towards a Permanence Order with a different foster carer;
* Working towards an Adoption Order or Permanence Order with current carer.

For a child this means the care planning process has concluded that they will benefit from spending some time being carer for away from home and there is a time-linked plan for rehabilitation with parents or an alternative care placement is being sought.

**Emergency:** An unplanned placement made in an emergency, where no other placement type has been identified by the local authority. (Under the Looked After Children Regulations 2009 an emergency placement must be reviewed by a local authority within 3 days, and may be extended for a period not exceeding 12 weeks).

For a child this will mean that there are immediate concerns for their safety and wellbeing and they require to be removed from their home environment as quickly as possible while the care planning process establishes the best option for the child.

**Short Break:** A placement which forms part of a planned series of short breaks (including emergency placements with a carer who is already providing planned short break placements to the child or young person).

For a child this will mean that because of special circumstances they and their carer will benefit from therapeutic services or periods of respite.

**Placement Matching**

Careful consideration should be given to the “matching” of children/young people to the skills, knowledge and experience of a particular foster carer(s). The Family Placement Service aims to ensure that the needs of children/young people are met by the skills and experience of foster carers.

Many of our foster carers have a wealth of experience in different areas to meet the needs of children/young people who have experienced abuse and trauma; have challenging behaviours; or complex needs.

The Family Placement Team Duty Worker is the first point of contact for enquiries from Children & Families Social Workers requiring a foster care placement. The Duty Worker will liaise closely with supervising social workers, foster carers and the C&F social worker to ensure that the best possible match is made for children/young people. Children and young people have individual needs and all placement requirements are unique.

Accurate matching is known to support better outcomes and increased placement stability.

**Recruitment**

West Lothian Council welcomes applications to become foster carers from the local and surrounding area, regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, and culture or employment status. Anyone over the age of 21 years may apply to become a foster carer.

There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of an offence against a child or any serious offence against an adult. There is no upper age limit for foster carers. Any applicant must be health and active, to enable them to care appropriately for a child. It is a minimum requirement that all prospective foster carers have at least one spare bedroom unless the child is young enough to be in a cot, which can be placed in the carer’s bedroom.

A recruitment strategy is being developed which utilises current data regarding placements and placement shortfall. More places are required for sibling groups and children affected by disability. Once in place the recruitment strategy will be regularly reviewed in order that the Family Placement Service can meet changing demands.

**Assessment Process**

In line with the Fostering Services: Foster Care and Family Placement Services (2011), we have an established process and procedure for recruiting, training and supporting carers.

**Enquiry**

On receipt of an enquiry from a potential foster carer(s). A qualified social worker from the Family Placement Team will obtain basic information from the enquirer and an initial visit will be arranged. During the initial visit, the fostering role and requirements will be discussed with the enquirer(s).

**Skills to Foster Training**

All suitable applicants are invited to attend a course of pre-approval training as part of the assessment process. The Skills to Foster training includes subject areas on Child Development; Separation and Loss; Working Together; Safe Care; and Moving On. On completion of the Skills to Foster training, suitable applicants are invited to complete an application form in order to progress to the fostering assessment/home study stage.

**Fostering Assessment/Home Study**

The fostering assessment/home study takes place in the applicant’s home over a period of 6-8 visits. An assessing social worker will be assigned to undertake a comprehensive assessment with the prospective carer(s) and their family. The assessing social worker will produce a report which covers individual profiles of applicants; relationships; support network; children within household; other adult members of household; childlessness/limitation of family size; description of family life; valuing diversity; and parenting capacity.

**Statutory Checks**

During the assessment West Lothian Council will undertake a variety of statutory checks to ensure the suitability of applicants. These checks will include:

* PVG;
* Local Authority;
* Medical Assessment;
* Personal Reference (at least 2);
* Ex-partner;
* Children from previous relationship;
* Employment
* A Health & Safety Inspection will also be completed; and
* Oversea checks were appropriate.

Relevant statutory checks, including PVG, will also be completed in respect of all individuals over 16yrs residing in the home.

We aim to complete the assessment within 26 weeks of the applicants attending Skills to Foster Training.

**Approval**

All applications are considered by West Lothian Council Fostering Panel, which then makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker, who makes the final decision regarding approval.

Applicants are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel with their assessing social worker. All information gathered (except references) is shared with the applicants. The social workers assessment is shared with the applicants prior to the panel and they are invited to add any comments to the report.

**Supervision, Support and Training of Foster Carers**

Training and Support:

* All Foster Carers are supervised by a Supervising Social Worker;
* Foster Carers have access to a regular support group;
* Foster Carers are provided with membership to the Fostering Network, which includes access free legal advice;
* Outside office hours, Foster Carers can access West Lothian Social Care Emergency Team; and
* On approval, Foster Carers are able to access training provided by West Lothian Council.

**Foster Carer Reviews**

All foster carers are subject to an annual review of their status as a foster carer. This is a formal review of the work they have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. Annual reviews are undertaken by the Fostering Panel or Team Manager and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer; their family; Supervising Social Worker; Child’s Social Worker; other relevant professionals; and the cared for Child/Young Person.

Concerns regarding a foster carers progress or change in circumstances can lead to a review being called at any time. The foster carer or Fostering Service can request a review at any time. All foster carers have updated PVG and medical reports every three years.

Reviews provide an opportunity to positively evaluate progress and practice over the previous year and plan training and development to support the foster carer(s) throughout the coming year.

**Allegations**

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated in accordance with West Lothian Council’s Child Protection Procedures. Foster carers are able to access independent support/advice via the Fostering Network Helpline.

Where foster carers live outside West Lothian Council or the incident leading to the allegation takes place outside West Lothian Council, the relevant authority’s child protection procedures are followed in discussion with West Lothian Council and the Family Placement Service.

**Complaints and Compliments**

West Lothian Council has a complaints procedure used by the Fostering Service. The full procedure is available to all children/young people, parents and foster carers. A guide to making compliments and complaints is also available for children who are placed with foster carers. Children/young people are also able to access an independent advocacy service.

All complaints made to the service are subject to a monitoring procedure. This assists service development and the development of good practice.

**Regulating Body**

Foster carers and children are also able to make complaints to the Care Inspectorate who are responsible for the inspection and registration of the fostering service. The Care Inspectorate can be contacted at:

Care Inspectorate

Compass House

11 Riverside Drive

Dundee

DD1 4NY

Tel: 0345 600 9527

[www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)

**Contact Details**

Family Placement Service

Strathbrock Partnership Centre

189a West Main Street

Broxburn

EH52 5LH

01506028440

***Angela Ferguson***

***01.02.2023***