



## **Statement of Purpose May 2024**

G.Manning, S.McCormack, E. McNeill, H.Copley

[enquiries@firststepsfostering.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@firststepsfostering.co.uk)

## Table of contents:

- Our Statement of Purpose ..... 3
- Contact Details ..... 3
- Vision and Values ..... 4
- People and Organisation ..... 6
- Aims and Objectives ..... 7
- Foster Carers ..... 8
- Recruitment of Foster Carers..... 9
- Panel..... 13
- Training and Development..... 14
- Assessment of Carers ..... 16
- Approval of Foster Carers ..... 16
- Foster Carer Reviews ..... 16
- Foster Care Agreements ..... 17
- Services and Support for Foster Carers ..... 17
- Our Work with Other Local Authorities..... 19
- Matching Children with Carers ..... 20
- Direct Work with Our Childre4 ..... 20
- Monitoring and Quality Assurance ..... 21
- Safeguarding ..... 23
- Equality and Diversity ..... 23
- Additional Services ..... 24
- Whistleblowing ..... 25
- Policy and Procedures..... 26
- Finance ..... 26
- Complaints Procedure..... 26

## **Our Statement of Purpose**

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require every fostering services provider to compile a written statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service.

This is the Statement of Purpose for First Steps Fostering. It outlines our aims and objectives, describes what we do and how we do it. The Statement is reviewed annually and is approved by all directors of the company. This document was revised in May 2024.

### *We Are an Independent Fostering Agency*

First Steps Fostering is an independent fostering agency. Ofsted registered First Steps Fostering on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023. First Steps is a small fostering service with a specialism in Parent and Child Foster Placements; however, our service extends to all children who require our care subject to rigorous matching. We have carers in the Southeast of England including Kent and Medway. We are an agency catering for a limited number of carers to offer the best service for our children and carers. We provide tailor-made support for parents, children and carers and strive for them both to develop, enjoy learning and thrive during their time with us.

The fostering agency is a private company, limited by guarantee. Our accounts are audited, and we take the view that financial stability is fundamental, so that we can develop our services and improve what we do.

## **Our Contact Details**

Offices: Unit 70, Maple Leaf Business Park, Ramsgate, Kent, CT12 5GD

Phone: 01843 423204 and 07921 044538

Website: [www.firststepsfostering.co.uk](http://www.firststepsfostering.co.uk)

Email: [enquiries@firststepsfostering.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@firststepsfostering.co.uk)

### **Our Vision and Values**

We work with all those involved in the lives of our foster children, believing our children can and will thrive. We provide excellent quality foster placements, including parent and child placements, ensuring that children are placed at the heart of our organisation. In agreement with the Children Act 1989, we subscribe to the view that, when possible, a child should be brought up within their own home, with their parents playing a full part in their upbringing. Our foster carers will be supported to allow children to remain living with their parents by assisting parents to learn how to safely care for and meet the needs of their children. We do however, recognise that this is not always possible, and as an agency, we work alongside Local Authorities to ensure that permanency is achieved for children at the earliest opportunity.

Children and their families are at the heart of what we do. We strongly believe that all children deserve safe care and opportunities to reach their full potential. For some children, specialist support is required to provide their parents with the best opportunities to achieve this. All placements are non-judgemental, inclusive and focus on a strengths-based model, where families are encouraged to build on their skills.

Our foster carers are there to support parents in caring for their children and not to disempower them. We also believe that the decisions made in respect of long-term care for children should be evidence based and as such we work closely with our carers to ensure

that they are provided with regular reflective supervision, training, and hands on support for them to carry out their role to the level required.

First Steps Fostering appreciates how valuable the time is in which children/children and their parents are in placement and ensures that such an opportunity is optimised.

The culture within the company is inclusive. The Assessment Manager and Supervising Social Worker(s) Manager will actively work with carers and their families, ensuring that there is a small, family feel with support readily available.

First Steps understand the vital role that feedback from carers, parents and children has in quality assurance and business development. This approach will ensure that the directors are aware of the practice within their agency first-hand and can ensure that placements are robustly monitored and fully encompass the value base of First Steps Fostering.

#### *Our Practice Model*

*“When a flower doesn’t bloom, we fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.” Alexander Den Heijer*

We believe that kindness matters, and we treat people with fairness, dignity, and respect. Together with our parents, carers and partners, we work with families to recognise and draw on existing resources, motivations, capabilities, and support systems to meet, challenge and overcome adversity. We aim to co-produce plans that identify sustainable solutions that require the least amount of professional intrusion in family life whilst at the same time, assessing if these solutions can be sustained for children.

Our practice model is strengthened using evidence-based approaches and tools: Motivational Interviewing, Trauma Informed Practice, Championing Participation, Co-Production, creative direct work with children, reflective supervision, child development, attachment and building on strengths.

The behaviours we seek to nourish are active listening, role modelling, honesty and transparency, being reflective, responsiveness, accountability and above all being child focussed.

### **People and Organisation**

Responsible Individual: Hannah Copley – Hannah began her Social Work career in 2011 and has extensive experience in safeguarding, management, procurement of services, supervision, auditing and compliance, and commissioning and developing community based services for parents and their children. Hannah Copley receives supervision from external consultant Chris Dingley who has extensive experience in the independent fostering sector.

Registered Manager: Elizabeth McNeill – Elizabeth began her Social Work career in 2013 and has vast experience in business management, management in Social Work, safeguarding, quality assurance and working with children in need of support, protection and those who are looked after. Hannah Copley provides Elizabeth McNeill supervisory oversight at a micro level focussing on case work. Elizabeth McNeill has access to supervision by Ms Lin Redman as ADM and part of the senior management team. Lin Redman was previously Registered Manager of an OFSTED ‘outstanding’ agency. This supervision will focus on best practice, professional development, themes and trends and compliance.

Supervising Social Worker and Training Delivery Manager: Gemma Manning – Gemma began her Social Work career in 2010 and has an array of experience as a senior Social Worker within fostering, children in care and child protection. Gemma has always taken the lead with parent and child foster placements throughout her career.

Assessment and Programme Delivery Manager: Sarah McCormack – Sarah began her Social Work career in 2013 and has a passion for robust, high-quality assessments and interventions to determine permanence for children. Sarah has delivered innovative training

programmes to Kent Police and has a track record of providing high-quality supervision and career progression to those she has managed to date.

Staff members receive regular supervision and annual appraisals. They have access to regular training to be aware of new developments, key changes in legislation, process, and best practice.

The Staff Handbook contains the agency's employment policies, procedures, and rules. To safeguard the welfare of children, our recruitment is governed by the agency's procedures for safer recruitment. Everyone who works for First Steps Fostering, in whatever capacity, is subject to an enhanced DBS check, interview and reference request and check prior to them commencing employment.

### **Our Aims and Objectives**

First Steps Fostering aims to:

- Provide foster care placements and support packages for children and/or their parent(s) that offer a stable and consistent experience of family life, to enhance and maximize their life opportunities.
- Recruit and retain foster carers from diverse backgrounds thus ensuring a range of appropriate placements for children and their parent(s).
- Respect and promote the ethical, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds of children and their parent(s).
- Make high quality matches between children, parent(s), and foster families where the skills and experience of the foster family provides the foundation for the improvement of the child's life and increases the skillset of their parent(s).

- Develop a fostering service where partnership, professionalism, respect, integrity, and fairness are central to all aspects of the operations and provisions.
- Always apply a children-centred approach where the welfare of the child is at the centre of everyone's thinking and actions.
- Provide a responsive, supportive, and professional 24-hour service for foster carers', children, their parent(s), and Local Authorities.
- Provide a commitment to the ongoing learning and professional development of the agency, foster carers, and staff by ensuring a diverse training programme is available.
- Ensure that the voice of the child is heard within the work that we do and that their needs are central to services.
- Establish, review, and maintain policies and procedures that will comply with legislative and statutory requirements and expectations.
- Our foster carers can expect weekly supervision if required, along with a minimum of two unannounced visits per year.
- Supervising Social Workers will keep in regular contact with their carers with more frequent visiting if necessary.
- Regular progress reports will be sent to the placing authority sharing the progress of the child and their parent(s).
- All carers must meet the competencies set out by the TSDS within twelve months of approval and will be supported by their Supervising Social Worker alongside a comprehensive training programme to achieve this.

### **Foster Carers**



First Steps Fostering specialise in parent and child placements however we will also provide foster care placements for children who are looked after by Local Authorities in line with matching and need. We appreciate that a parent may also be a looked after child and could support a pregnant child as a solo placement. A parent may leave placement and the agency would be committed to continuing to care for the baby as a solo placement if this was in the baby's best interests. The agency is based in Kent although we work with Local Authorities Nationwide. We cannot overstate what a challenge it is, to find people who will give children the foster home which is right for them. The needs of children always come first. Finding a match for a child with foster carers involves assessing how well the backgrounds, skills and experience of the carers will meet the needs of a child. With this at the forefront, our recruitment searches for people who will support and nurture children in their health, education, psychological and emotional wellbeing.

### **Recruitment of Foster Carers**

We will have an on-going programme of safer recruitment, using word of mouth, the internet and local advertisement. Enquiries and applications to foster are welcomed from people regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, and culture or employment status. We aim to recruit foster carers who share our value base and demonstrate the key skills needed to support parents and their children. Our assessment and approval process fully complies with the Assessment and Approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013.

In terms of outcomes for children in care, we at First Steps Fostering believe that the selection process for the foster carers we recruit is as important as the training, support, and supervision we provide to the foster carers once they are approved. This makes the

recruitment and assessment processes crucial to us. Prospective foster carers have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

All prospective foster carers who make an enquiry are subject to rigorous assessment and vetting procedures as well as support, kindness and compassion throughout the process.

This includes the following:

#### *An Initial Enquiry*

An initial enquiry may be completed via our website, social media or telephone.

#### *Telephone Discussion*

Telephone contact will then be made with the prospective foster carer within one working day to book a home visit.

#### *Initial Visits*

An initial visit takes place to the home of the prospective foster carer(s). The initial visit is booked within five working days from the completion of the telephone call to the prospective foster carer, if they are available. If the initial visit is successful and both parties wish to proceed, the relevant documentation is discussed. Following this, the applicant is invited to complete an application form.

#### *Application Paperwork*

The prospective foster carer(s) must complete an application form, giving detailed information about themselves and their family and consent to First Steps Fostering undertaking further checks and enquiries to determine their suitability to foster. These include:

- Enhanced DBS checks on all members of the household over 18 years. These involve disclosure of information about any criminal convictions or cautions and other information,

which may be held by the Police or Government Agencies relevant to the protection of children.

- Enquiries to Social Services Departments and their Child Protection Registers.
- Enquiries to other agencies where appropriate.

#### *Medical Check*

The applicant(s) are required to have a full medical assessment completed by their GP and the report is made available to our Agency Medical Adviser for comment about the applicant(s) health and any impact this may have on their fostering potential.

#### *References*

The applicant(s) is asked to identify three personal referees who will provide written references and be interviewed as part of the assessment process. One of these must be a relative of the applicant. When applicants have had previous partners, the agency requires their details as well: it is likely references will be sought from them, particularly when there are children from the relationship unless there are extenuating circumstances. In which case further information from other sources will be sought and a risk assessment is completed. References will also be taken from past employers. References will be taken in confidence but may not remain so. There may be a need to disclose the contents of a reference if it forms the basis of an agency decision not to approve a prospective carer.

All applicants are invited to Skills to Foster Training covering the responsibilities of being a foster carer and working with First Steps Fostering Agency. All prospective foster carers must attend this training. First Steps Fostering make use of the competencies approach in all stages of the recruitment, assessment, and approval of the foster carers. We endorse the view expressed in the Fostering Network Code of Practice that the use of common, standard assessment tools, such as those produced by the Fostering Network and the CoramBAAF Form F, will enable fostering services to achieve uniform standards. Carers who are being

assessed as Parent and Child Carers will complete additional training specific to Parent and Child Fostering.

The assessment has two stages Stage 1 and Stage 2 of Fostering Assessment: In accordance with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, which amended the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

These stages may be carried out concurrently, but the information required for Stage 1 as defined in Schedule 3 Part 1 of the Regulations, must be sought as soon as possible, and the decision about whether an applicant has successfully completed Stage 1 must be made within 10 working days of all the information required in that stage being received.

If during Stage 1 it is decided that an applicant is not suitable to foster, the applicant has no right to a review of this decision by the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism), nor to make representations to First Steps Fostering Agency.

If in Stage 2 a decision is made that the applicant is not suitable to foster then a brief report is completed, the applicant advised, and their comments sought within 10 working days. After the 10 working days, or following receipt of the applicant's comments, whichever is sooner, First Steps Fostering send the report, any comments from the applicant and any other relevant information to the fostering panel and then ADM. The applicant may, within 28 days, seek a review of this determination by the IRM or make representations to First Steps Fostering Agency. All information obtained about prospective foster carers is held on file in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the data protection Act 1998. Upon request some of this information can be viewed. References from external agencies and personal references, which are given in confidence, cannot be accessed without the consent of both the subject and the relevant referees.

## **Panel**

In accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 Standard 14, First Steps Fostering recruited persons suitable to sit on fostering panels. This includes members and professionals who have knowledge of the local areas for which they are considering cases and making recommendations.

Panel members on the central list include professionals from education, health, Social Work, an expert by experience, foster carer and former Police Officer.

Our panel has a balance of gender, ethnicity and qualifications that reflects our commitment to bring together individuals from different backgrounds and expertise.

Panel makes recommendations about the suitability of applicant(s) to be approved as foster carers with First Steps Fostering, and reasons for their recommendation. The final decision for approval is made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who takes account of the Fostering Panel's recommendations before deciding whether to approve a person as a foster carer, on what terms and the reasons for approval. The ADM is Lin Redman.

Their decision is made within seven working days of receipt of the Panel's recommendation through the panel minutes. The ADM also records the reasons for their recommendation. Once the decision is made the prospective foster carer is informed verbally within two working days and confirmation sent in writing to them within 5 working days.

First Steps Fostering Agency views the Fostering Panel as a valuable and indispensable source of Quality Assurance, professional accountability, and feedback.

## **Training and Development**

We are very aware that fostering is a challenging task, therefore we will provide a comprehensive training programme which covers all relevant areas of care. We also support

our carers to complete and achieve the Training Support and Development (TSD) Standard within 12 months of approval.

All foster carers have their own copy of the standards workbook guidance. The TSD standards are:

- Standard 1: understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
- Standard 2: understand your role as a foster carer.
- Standard 3: understand health and safety, and healthy care.
- Standard 4: know how to communicate effectively.
- Standard 5: understand the development of children and young people.
- Standard 6: safeguard children and young people.
- Standard 7: develop yourself.

Fostering requires opportunities for reflection and learning. We are committed to providing high quality learning and development opportunities that are accessible, credible, and relevant to all our foster carers. It is especially important for us to recognise that every foster carer has a wealth of life experiences and skills which will contribute to the quality of their work and help them understand children and young people as well as their emotions and behaviours.

However, at First Steps Fostering we acknowledge that there are areas where our foster carers benefit from specialist training to help them meet the needs of children in their care. Alongside a dedicated programme for learning and development, are opportunities for bespoke learning linked to individual need and experience.

We are committed to maintaining and developing the highest standards for all our services and our training and development programmes are central to this. All carers and staff have a Personal Development Plan, reviewed annually.

We encourage all carers to take responsibility for their learning and developmental activity.

This is achieved by:

- An individual personal development plan.
- An annual training programme.
- Regular support and supervision visits with their supervising Social Worker.

All training is reviewed at the foster carer's annual review, with any gaps in knowledge considered and appropriate training identified. There is no limit to the training that foster carers can attend, however there is a minimum expectation of training, including mandatory training for all foster carers.

Training is provided to:

- Improve knowledge, develop and refine skills.
- Establish an explicit, positive framework of values, which promotes equality and opportunity.
- Encourage foster carers to reflect and look at the effects of discrimination in all parts of the community, recognising that they care for children and their parents in the context of the wider society, and that for many children discrimination is a fact of everyday life.
- Ensure that all foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm.
- Encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own professional development through the creation of individual training profiles.

### **Assessment of Foster Carers**

First Steps Fostering carry out all assessments in line with the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards. We use the CoramBAAF Form F template for the assessment process and reports. Establishing the suitability of applicants involves an in-depth assessment process. Applicants participate in a series of visits to the home by the assessing social worker, who is a specialist in this role. The agency seeks detailed references and the satisfactory completion of important checks into the background and circumstances of the applicants and can take up to 8 months.

### **Approval of Foster Carers**

When the assessment process has been completed there are two further stages, the fostering panel and then the decision by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The ADM is not a member of the fostering panel and is independent of the assessment process.

### **Foster Carer Reviews**

The main aim of the annual review is to decide whether the foster carer approval continues to be suitable and whether there should be any changes in the terms of the approval. It is an opportunity to look at the progress the carer has made and to set targets and goals for the next year. All approved carers take part in an annual review. Fostering regulations require the first review following approval to be presented to the fostering panel. Thereafter, at First Steps Fostering, annual review reports will go to the panel at least every three years. We invite foster carers to attend on these occasions.

In addition to annual reviews, foster carer reports also go to panel in these circumstances:

- When there are major concerns about suitability of the carer.



- Following the investigation of any allegations against the carer.
- When carers request termination of approval.
- When significant changes in the terms of approval are being considered.

### **Foster Care Agreements**

Following the ADM's notification of the decision on approval, carers agree and sign a foster care agreement, which sets out all their duties and requirements. It is reviewed annually.

### **Services and Support for Foster Carers**

- Weekly supervision sessions at the start of any new placement take place to ensure that the needs of the parent and child are being met for the first 4 weeks, as well as the needs of the foster carer and their family. Supervision will be held at least 4 weekly thereafter but this is dependent on the needs of the carer and complexity of placement.
- Foster carers are expected to record daily logs for the children and parents in their care and are supported to ensure that these logs are evidence based, and accurately record the child and their parent's journey.
- Frequent phone contact. Our carers have contact from their Fostering Social Worker by phone or text on a frequent and regular basis. We are always on hand to offer support and guidance.
- Out of hours support. There is 24-hour telephone support every day of the year. We are always contactable, whatever the time of the day.
- Birth children support and events. First Steps Fostering appreciate that fostering involves not only the foster carers but also their own birth children. As such it is important to us that we provide support to birth children whilst also providing them with an

opportunity to engage in activities with other young people whose parents are also in the fostering role.

- Regular social events, including exciting days out, family fun days, and festive celebrations throughout the year.
- Two weeks paid planned breaks. First Steps Foster carers are given 2 weeks planned breaks per year without a parent and child should this be necessary following their first successful annual review. This time is for the foster carer to re-group as a family and recharge their batteries. Foster carers are paid their fostering fee whilst taking the planned breaks.
- Day care for parent and child at least once per month. This time enables the carer have a break and to attend to 'life admin' without the responsibility of the parent and child for a period of time. This day care is provided by a Social Worker or Social Work Assistant within the agency who uses this opportunity to provide support and learning opportunities to the parent and seeking feedback, whilst also using this as an opportunity to quality assure the observations of the foster carer.
- Individual membership to Fostering Network.
- Comprehensive preparation and induction training. Foster carers receive at least 2 full days of Skills to Foster training before they begin their journey as a foster carer, as well as individual coaching from the assessing worker. All First Steps Foster carers received face-to-face paediatric training. In the early days of fostering, we make sure that foster carers have covered all the fostering induction standards set down by government, and that they are fully guided and supported by their Fostering Social Worker.
- A regular programme of training is in place for each foster carer, having their own individual training development plan.

- Monthly skills share groups/support groups. Core fostering skills will be developed through monthly group training or skills share sessions. We cover topics such as: attachment; behaviour support; safeguarding; the impact of abuse; mental health; substance misuse; developmental stages; and independent living skills. Annual refresher training will also be available to build upon existing knowledge. This is also their opportunity to come together as a team, contribute to the development of the service and have their say.
- All foster carers have a minimum of an annual review which is an opportunity to appraise the last year of their foster care and set new goals and action for the year ahead. Training needs are assessed and identified. If any concerns do arise about a foster carer's commitment to on-going development this is addressed with them. Where necessary this can include reviewing their registration at the fostering panel.
- All of our foster carers receive a minimum of two unannounced visit to their home within each year to meet the requirements of national standards and regulations, with our best practice intention to undertake three unannounced visits within a year to ensure that children are safe and are being well cared for.

### **Our Work with Local Authorities**

We provide local authorities with foster homes for children with their parent (s) and placements for children who cannot be placed with their parents. Our carers provide parent and child placements, short term placements and respite.

### **Matching Children with Carers**

First Steps Fostering recognise and respect that every child and their parent(s) are unique individuals. Placements are matched to ensure that the needs of the child, young person

and parent can be met appropriately by the foster carer with the relevant skills and experience. All referrals are subject to the agency's risk assessments before the decision to place is agreed. We ensure that close communication takes place between our dedicated First Steps Fostering staff, Local Authority colleagues and our foster carers during all placements being made. All decisions to place children and their parents in our foster care placements are overseen by the Registered Manager or director in her absence.

This helps to ensure that we make the best possible matching between each child and our foster carers and have access to all relevant documentation from the placing authority as per the regulations.

### **Direct Work and Involving our Children**

As an agency specialising in parent and child placements a large proportion of the children in our care are pre-school and non-verbal or with limited speech. In order to ensure their voices are heard we draw upon our skills of observations, reflective discussions with the parents and carers, ensuring supervision gives time and space for reflection on how the child is feeling and why.

As highly experienced Social Workers, we have a broad range of knowledge and skills to ensure that we are actively ascertaining children's views, reflecting on what the care provided to them means for them and advocating for them.

All foster carers are required to keep relevant memorabilia for the children they foster and to work with them on understanding their history. Supervising Social Workers will be providing guidance and support to the foster carers throughout the placement. A memory box is also provided to the foster carer which moves with the child once the placement ends.

### **Monitoring and Quality Assurance**

The Registered Manager oversees a comprehensive monitoring system in accordance with the requirements of schedule 6 (Fostering Regulations) and the notification stipulations of Schedule 7. Safeguarding matters are a key priority, and the Registered Manager has lead responsibility. The Directors will consider regular reports under Regulation 35 of the Fostering Services Regulations. They are aware of business, recruitment and service delivery activity, and factual data is further informed by personal knowledge of the agency's foster carers, children and their parents gained via live supervision and actively seeking feedback.

The outcomes and progress for children and their parents is monitored and understood by narrative and qualitative measures, and the means of doing so will be under regular review. Annual audits of practice identify opportunities for learning and development across the agency.

The performance of First Steps Fostering is monitored at several levels and in several ways:

- OFSTED will inspect regularly to ensure that First Steps Fostering complies with legislation and standards (this may be annually or every 3 years depending on compliance).
- Activity is monitored at a strategic level against the objectives, performance indicators and tasks as contained in the Business Development Plan.
- The Registered Manager, or director in her absence, ensures that necessary checks are completed in the recruitment of staff and foster carers following safer recruitment procedures. The manager is responsible for the co-ordination of DBS checks, Local Authority checks, references, and all employment safeguards and will be supported by the management tool Intuitivecare.
- Foster carers are provided, as far as possible with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency, records will be maintained on carers and Children in Care in accordance with

National Minimum Standards and Data Protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest. Missing information from the Local Authority will be subject to escalation procedures.

- All children and young people placed with our foster carers are provided with a copy of our children's guide based on their age and level of understanding.
- First Steps Fostering has a parent's guide for their parent and child placements.
- First Steps Fostering has developed a comprehensive, but easy to understand, 'Foster Carer Handbook'. The handbook is accessible online but other formats can be provided as required, to aid them with the fostering task. The handbook contains information on financial, health and safety matters, fostering law, assessing the needs of children and young people, care planning, health, education, complaints and grievances, training, child protection and record keeping. The handbook is reviewed regularly by the agency and Tri-X.
- Panel functioning and evaluation.
- Any child protection matter needs to be reported to the Registered Manager who works closely with the placing authority to ensure the protection of children.
- Opportunities for feedback will be actively sought and used to strive to improve the service to meet the needs of children, their families, carers and the Local Authority.

### **Safeguarding**

First Steps Fostering is committed to ensuring a safe environment for everyone connected to the service. We strive to ensure our foster carers' homes are welcoming and safe, that our foster carers are reflective and skilled in providing a safe and nurturing environment to parents and their children.

Our fostering Social Workers have several years' experience in safeguarding children's teams for Local Authorities and are adept in supporting carers to work with the trauma that parents have suffered.

First Steps Fostering's safeguarding procedures lay down a clear format for the reporting of any child protection matter to the Registered Manager, Responsible Individual and OFSTED if required. The overriding aim is to ensure the protection of children/young people.

The Registered Manager will seek to ascertain accurate details of any allegation that is made against a carer/staff member/person in a position of trust and will liaise with the child's placing authority, the Local Authority Designated Officer, and the area authority in which the foster carer(s) reside. A joint decision will be made about whether there is a need for further safeguarding action in respect of protecting the child or children.

As a preventative measure, stringent checks are completed prior to foster carer's approval and employment of all staff and updated within legislative timescales.

### **Equality and Diversity**

First Steps Fostering Agency is committed to equality of opportunity. Our vision places equality at the heart of our approach to policy making, service delivery and employment. We are fully committed to providing holistic services which embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. Our goal is to ensure that these commitments, reinforced by our values, are embedded in our day to day working practices with all parents, children, foster families, colleagues, customers, and any other stakeholders. We provide equal opportunities for all and do not tolerate discrimination. We are committed to identifying, understanding, and eliminating all barriers that prevent access to services, information, and employment.

Our service provision to Local Authorities, foster carers, children in care and their parents reflect this culture of diversity, ensuring that our services, safer recruitment, and general business do not discriminate on any grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race and ethnicity
- Religion and belief (or non-belief)
- Sexual orientation

Foster carer training, both pre- and post- approval encourages a commitment to respecting an individual's ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic background of children and young people who are looked after through our agency.

### **Additional Services**

In addition to foster placements, First Steps Fostering can provide assessments/interventions all completed by experienced and fully trained Social Workers. To achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity, we understand and aspire to provide children's parents with a tailored package of support through teaching sessions, role modelling and 24-hour support to the carers to give them the best opportunity to make and sustain changes for their children. This, of course, needs to be assessed, which is an additional service that First Steps can provide in a variety of different forms, in line with parents'/children's needs and direction from the Courts and commissioning Local Authority.



At First Steps Fostering, it is our strong belief that the most effective way of assessing and supporting parents is for an initial parenting assessment (including CUBAS) to be completed. The teaching plan from this assessment to be implemented by the foster carer and a trained Social Worker in conjunction with the Child's Social Worker, before reassessing, to evidence if the parent has made the necessary changes required. This model of assessment provides clear evidence as to whether a parent can care for their child in the long term, in a safe and consistent way, and where any gaps in their skillset fall.

First Steps Fostering are also able to provide risk assessments, domestic abuse programmes and supervise family time.

### **Whistleblowing**

Staff, carers, and other people involved with the agency must feel they are able to raise their concerns about malpractice or wrongdoing in any aspect of First Steps Fostering's work. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 applies to employees, but at First Steps Fostering it is our policy to extend these principles to foster carers (who are self-employed), their family and support network, panel members and consultants.

### **Policies and Procedures**

First Steps Fostering Agency has comprehensive policies, procedures, and practice manuals in accordance with regulations. Our foster carer's handbook and manuals contain information on safeguarding/child protection, safer caring, first aid, unauthorised absence, health and safety matters, training, financial matters, complaints and grievances, record keeping and others.

### **Finance**

In accordance with National Minimum Standards 2011 Standard 28: foster carers receive an allowance to provide for all the practical needs for a Child in Care. With regards to the fostering allowance there are certain minimum amounts of the allowance which are allocated for specific purposes. Foster carers are advised that the allowance must cater for all the children's needs. Within our parent and child placement the parent will continue to claim state benefit unless they are looked after themselves and will therefore provide for aspects of their own child's care needs.

### **Complaints Procedure**

In accordance with National Minimum Standards 2011 Standard 25, First Steps Fostering has developed a comprehensive complaints procedure and will appoint an Independent Complaints Officer if the need arises. The complaints procedure is made widely available to service users and is reviewed regularly to check satisfactory operation and to identify any patterns and actions taken on individual complaints. First Steps Fostering reviews complaints made as a serious matter, but also as a learning opportunity to improve the level of service provided. In relation to any complaints received First Steps Fostering aim to reflect and take appropriate action to change policies, practices, and procedures, addressing the complaints and resolving matters identified to prevent future occurrence.

We also welcome suggestions about our service and how we might improve it. All suggestions are considered and responded to.

**BLANK PAGE**