The fostering regulations, standards and guidance provide the legal framework for how fostering services look after children placed within foster care. Trafford Council Fostering Service wants to make sure that we provide good quality care for the children we look after.

**Why do children live with foster carers?**

Your child or children are being cared for by an approved foster carer or carers. This may be for different kinds of reasons – someone may be ill or there may be a family crisis.

You may have asked for help in caring for your child or children or a Court may have made an order in your child's best interests. As a parent you will continue to have parental responsibility whilst plans are made for your child.

**What is a foster placement?**

Foster care placements provide either short-term, permanence or respite care. The placement can last for a few days or an extended period of time depending on your child's needs. A foster care placement is a way of giving your child a safe and secure place to live within a family environment, whilst you and/or they are able to resolve any difficulties.

**What kind of people are foster carers?**

Foster carers are people who come from different walks of life and backgrounds who have been assessed and trained to care for children and young people in their own homes. Foster carers will try and make sure that, wherever possible, your child's routine is followed and will aim to work alongside you. Foster carers work alongside social care professionals, children, young people and parents, to achieve high quality care.

Before a child is placed with a foster carer we will try our best to 'match' your child's needs with a suitable carer. This means finding carers who can provide care which relates to your child's age, geographical home base and school. Whenever possible we will arrange introductory meetings and visits before a placement. However, because sometimes problems developed quickly and children need to be placed as soon as possible we cannot match as thoroughly as we would like to do. A Placement Planning Meeting takes place though, and this sets out the aims of the placement and share information. You will almost always be invited and encouraged to attend this meeting.

The placement planning meeting will agree what activities the foster carer will be allowed to agree. This is called delegated authority and is to try to ensure that your child experiences a normal family life during their time in foster care, and is not made to feel different from their friends.

As a parent you will, wherever possible you will have the opportunity to meet your child's foster carers. You will be encouraged to work alongside the foster carer in supporting your child.
This may mean attending medical appointments and parents evenings and attending meetings that relate to your child’s needs. How much you are involved will be agreed between your child's social worker and yourselves. You still have certain responsibilities, for example in agreeing to specific medical procedures.

The only time when such things will not be possible is where your child's Care Plan or the Court has outlined or stated otherwise.

**What kind of assessment do foster carers need?**

All of our foster carers receive a thorough assessment and training before they can foster children. This includes references and statutory checks for suitability.

There is a training course which is called 'Skills to Foster' that all foster carer applicants have to attend.

Once the training and assessment have been completed, the assessment is placed before the Fostering Panel. The panel consider the full report from the qualified social worker who has undertaken the assessment ensuring that all statutory checks have been completed and are satisfactory.

The Panel will then recommend whether or not the carers should be approved by Trafford Council. The recommendation is then presented to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Agency Decision Maker will take an independent look at all the information that has been submitted to the Fostering Panel and decide whether or not to approve someone as a foster carer.

If they are approved, foster carers must attend mandatory training to make sure that they know about the important issues to help them to care for children. Training needs of the carers are discussed in their annual Foster Carer Review.

**What standards are expected of foster carers?**

We make sure foster carers know what is expected of them and we expect that they will:

- Have a safe, warm and comfortable house. Some children will have their own bedroom and others may share a bedroom with other children, but they will always have their own bed and somewhere to store their personal possessions.

- Work in partnership with birth parents; talking with parents about how their children’s needs can be met and about major decisions to be made about the children.

- Help children to keep contact with their families. As a parent, it is important for you to keep in contact with your child, provided this is part of his or her Care Plan.

- Help children with school and things such as their homework.
• Help children to meet their religious or cultural needs.
• Help and support children with their hobbies and interests.
• Ensure children go for health, eye and dental checks when needed.
• Ensure children eat a healthy and balanced diet.
• Ensure children are well clothed with clean and have suitable clothing.
• Share relevant information with the children’s social worker. Foster carers are expected to tell the social worker everything important that relates to your child's care or future care.
• Spent time with each individual child and young person to find out how they are and to help with any problems they may have.

Fostering Service Structure

If you turn to the back of this booklet you can see contact details and telephone numbers. All of our Supervising social workers are qualified.

The management structure and details of the fostering team staff are written in the Statement of Purpose and is available on Trafford Fostering website.

Our Principles and Standards of Care

As stipulated in the Children Act 1989, the best place for children to be cared for is with their family unless this is not possible. The next best option is for children to be cared for in a similar type of environment, i.e. a family placement.

All children are therefore entitled to have an opportunity to live with a “family” and no child should be considered as “unfosterable”.

Children who are cared for by the local authority in a foster placement should have the same experiences and access to the same opportunities as other children.

Children in Trafford being placed with foster carers deserve to be carefully matched with their carers when the placement is first made. Every effort will be made to ensure that this is done. Where children in foster care have identified needs that cannot be met in placement, serious consideration will be given to what other ways this can be achieved.

The Family Placement Team values the contribution made by all of its foster carers, and will seek to provide them with the best training, support and careful assessment to enable them to do their job to the best of their ability.

The Family Placement Team seeks to operate in an open and accountable fashion. Children should always be given the support and advice they need. Their views are valued and listened to.
We want every child in the care of Trafford and every care leaver to reach their full potential: they have the right to be healthy, happy safe and secure, and to feel loved, valued and respected

The Trafford Children in Care Service Principles:

- Provide a stable and supportive home with caring, consistent relationships
- Listen and respond to children’s views, wishes and feelings and consult with them about the development of services
- Place children within families whenever possible, and as close to the child’s community as possible
- Respect and promote children’s rights
- Take a whole council approach to the care and support we provide to children in care and care leavers
- Safeguard the welfare, health and happiness of all children in care and care leavers
- Have high aspirations for each child
- Respect and value diversity
- Promote contact with family and friends
- Ensure that children in care are given the opportunity to leave care only when they are ready and equipped to do so
- Support and prepare care leavers to make an effective transition to independent living
- Make decisions based on assessment of need
- Celebrate children’s achievement

Will anyone visit my child in foster care?

Every child in foster care will have a social worker who will visit them and see them on their own. Your child’s social worker will check his or her bedroom and ensure he or she is being looked after properly. The foster carer will also be visited by their own supervising social worker to check that everything is all right and to give them support and supervision.

What arrangements are there to make sure my child is well cared for?

As the start of each placement with a foster carer, there is a Placement Planning Meeting. This meeting is attended by all those people who will be involved with your child. These will be your child’s social worker, the foster carer, the supervising social worker of the foster carer, the child depending on how old they are and where possible any relevant family member. At this meeting all the arrangements that will affect your child’s health and education whilst they are in foster care are discussed. Contact arrangements, hobbies and leisure activities and religious and dietary needs
are also discussed. This is an opportunity for you to share your wishes and feelings regarding your child and what you want the placement to provide. The meeting will also discuss what delegated authority can be given to the foster carer to be able to deal with the day to day practical issues for your child. This may mean signing for school trips or agreeing haircuts.

Your child's Care Plan will be regularly reviewed to see if it is working and to update it in line with your child's needs. An Independent Reviewing Officer chairs these meetings. You will be invited and your views, together with those of your child will be taken into account.

**What kind of 'rules' will the foster carer have?**

Like all families, foster carers do have some rules that children will be asked to follow. There will not be lots of rules in any one family and rules should be 'commonsense' to help adults and children to live together in a happy atmosphere. As each foster carer is different it is not possible to state here what the rules of each one are. We would expect that any rules are discussed with your child's social worker, your child, and wherever possible you. Most of the rules will be about keeping your child safe or making sure that everybody in the home can get on together.

The kind of rules might be about things such as:

- Being polite and kind to others
- Looking after clothes and toys
- Doing homework
- Coming home at the agreed times

As in most families, when rules are broken there can be "consequences". Foster carers are trained not to concentrate too much on "bad" behaviour but to reward behaviour that is "good". Sometimes foster carers may just need to talk to your child about what has happened, to increase understanding of each other.

If your child breaks something on purpose, he or she may have to pay something towards it being replaced (he or she will not have all of their pocket money stopped though). They may have to do an extra job, or not be allowed to do something special such as staying up late at the weekend or watching a favourite TV programme.

Foster carers are not allowed to use physical punishment. The fostering service provides guidance, procedures and training for foster carers regarding behaviour management.

**What if I am concerned about the care my child is receiving from his or her foster carers?**

If you are not happy about something you should always talk to your child's social worker. You should have been given their contact number and the number of the
office. There are sometimes small things that people are not happy with and can find annoying. These can be things such as bedtimes, diet, clothing or toys.

Sometimes it takes time for parents and foster carers to get to know each other. Many of these things can be quickly sorted out by talking to your child's social worker who will discuss your concerns with the fostering service and the supervising social worker for the foster carer.

If you have tried talking to the social worker and you do not feel it has worked, ask to speak to the social worker’s manager. If you would rather, you can write a letter to the ‘Complaints Officer’ at Trafford Council. Address and telephone number are listed at the back of this booklet.

Parents also have the right to complain direct to Ofsted who have responsibility for inspecting and ensuring high quality foster services. Their contact number is listed in Useful Contacts at the end of this booklet.

What if I am concerned that my child is being bullied?

If you feel that your child is being bullied please tell your child's social worker or the foster carer as soon as possible. It is important that Social Workers are aware of any bullying so that we can be sure that it can be stopped and the child who is being bullied can be helped and protected. We will always make sure that any worries about bullying are properly looked into and dealt with.

How can I be assured my child will be kept safe in a placement?

A child’s safety and well-being is paramount when they are placed with a foster carer. Foster carers ensure that they actively safeguard and protect children and young people from any form of significant harm. All foster carers have a Safer Caring Policy which covers everyone in the household and also your child will have an individual safer caring policy to ensure they are kept safe at all times. A risk assessment will have been completed on your child for the Placement Planning Meeting and everyone who attends the meeting will look at any associated risks and how to manage them.

Health and Education

All foster carers must ensure that they provide children with a healthy lifestyle. The carers must ensure that they encourage children to participate in a range of positive activities that help the child be both physically and emotionally healthy.

What kind of activities will my child be involved with?

Your child's daily routine will be as part of a fostering family. Sometimes foster carers, together with their friends and families and young people who are fostered, meet up for activities together. Each child is encouraged to participate in activities or groups they are interested in e.g. cadets, brownies, swimming or learning a musical instrument.
Can I influence the quality of the Fostering Service?

Yes, we want to continually improve our services. We would therefore like to hear from you if you have any comments, compliments or complaints about the Fostering Service. This will help us to plan better for the future and make high quality fostering placements for children and young people.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Trafford Family Placement Team

Children in Care Service
Ground Floor
Trafford Town Hall
Talbot Road
Manchester
M32 OTH

Telephone: 0161 912 5050
Email: fostering@trafford.gov.uk

Complaints

Compliance and Governance,
Trafford Town Hall
Talbot Road
Stretford
Manchester
M32 OYH

You can make your complaint by email using the email address below – complaintscyps@trafford.gov.uk
You can also make your complaint by telephone by contacting Steve Byrom, Compliance and Governance Officer, on 0161 912 4698. The email address of Steve Byrom is – Steven.Byrom@trafford.gov.uk

Complaints to Ofsted

Complaints can also be made directly to OFSTED, who have responsibility for inspecting local authority fostering services:
Ofsted regulate social care services in England, such as children’s homes, residential family centres and fostering and adoption services. If you feel that you want to make a complaint directly to Ofsted then the details of how to contact Ofsted are provided below –
Ofsted: 0300 123 1231
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Ofsted have produced a guide about how to register concerns and complaints which can be found by clicking on the following link – http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/concerns-and-complaints-about-social-care-providers

If you want to complain about something to someone not working in Trafford you can contact the Office of the Children’s Commissioner, you can call the Children’s Commissioner on the free phone number 0800 528 0731 or email to advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

The current Children's Commissioner for England is Dr. Maggie Atkinson

Address
The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

**Trafford Fostering Website**

The Fostering website can be found at

The fostering service produces a Guide to Fostering for Children Under the Age of 10 years, a Guide to Fostering for children and Young People 11-18 years and a Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service. These documents are all available on the website.