

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

July 2011

The Fostering Team is regulated and inspected by Ofsted against the Fostering Regulations 2011 and Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011. The Statement of Purpose is a requirement under the Standards and it is written as a description of fostering arrangements for children looked after by Blackpool Council. Also, the Statement of Purpose is intended to provide a clear guide of the work undertaken by the Fostering Team to birth parents, professionals, the public, council members, foster carers and external organisations. Information contained in the Statement of Purpose is updated and a new version produced each year.

To obtain a copy of the Statement of Purpose please contact the Fostering Team at Progress House, Clifton Road, Blackpool, FY4 4US. Arrangements can be made for the document to be produced in larger print or in a different language or format.

Any comments or enquiries regarding the contents of the Statement of Purpose should be made to Claire Samuels Fostering Team Manager by phone 01253 477888 or email claire.samuels@blackpool.gov.uk



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1.1 Status and Constitution

As a local authority, Blackpool Council holds statutory powers and responsibilities in relation to fostering provision for looked after children. Acting on behalf of the local authority, the Fostering Team actively endeavours to ensure that equality and diversity is incorporated into all aspects of service delivery. All prospective foster carers are recruited and supported on the basis of their ability to undertake the fostering task, and the needs of the service regardless of their individual characteristics that may include their age, race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

Blackpool Council has a commitment to every looked after child achieving the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes. There are five outcomes which are: Staying Safe, Being Healthy, Enjoying and Achieving, Economic Well Being and Making a Positive Contribution. Blackpool Council believes that all children needing substitute care should have the opportunity to live in a family setting. The Council's commitment and responsibilities to children and young people in its care is reflected in Blackpool Children's Trust Annual Report 2010 and Blackpool Children and Young People's Plan 2009-2012. We consulted with Foster Carers by questionnaire in March 2011. Based on the response we know that Foster Carers feel generally well supported.

1.2 Fostering Service Principles

The following set of principles guide the day-to-day practice of the Fostering Team.

1. Whenever possible the child is kept within its own community, family and friendship network.
2. Foster care is a partnership between the foster carers, supervising social workers and the child's social worker all working together with the child, their nuclear and extended family (whenever possible). The focus will always be to achieve what is in the best interests of the child.
3. The cultural, racial, linguistic and religious identities of children, their parents and foster carers will be respected in the development of the foster care service and in making and supporting individual placements.
4. Children have the right to continuity in their lives in order to enable them to develop and maintain positive self-esteem and identity and to promote their physical and mental wellbeing and for them to achieve their full potential.
5. Foster carers should be consulted at every opportunity in order to develop and improve services to foster carers, their children, looked after children and their families.

1.3 Fostering Service Aims

Blackpool Council's Fostering Team has four broad aims which are:

1. To ensure there is sufficient safe, high quality substitute family care for children looked after
2. That there is an ongoing recruitment strategy objective, which focuses on inviting applications from all sectors of the community and responding to each enquiry in a professional and timely manner
3. That foster carers receive regular visits and communication by fostering

supervising social workers and fostering support officers

4. That Family Finding for children who require foster families to care for them into adulthood remains a priority

1.4 Fostering Service Standards of Care

1. The true cost of caring for a foster child must be met and foster carers given the opportunity to receive payment for their time, experience and skills
2. Foster carers and social workers have a right to prepare for their role and a responsibility to use training opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.
3. Foster carers, social workers, looked after children and their parents must be able to call upon the placing agency for support.
4. The responsibility of the placing agency to the foster carers, the purpose and goals of each placement and the responsibilities of all parties must be stated in writing.
5. Formal decisions relating to an individual child's foster care should be taken in full consultation with them, their parents, and the foster carers.
6. Foster carers, children and their parents should be able to challenge decisions and plans proposed by the fostering agency and be informed about how to make a complaint or representation.

1.5 The Fostering Team

The Fostering Team is committed to working in partnership with the community, the child and their family, the child's social worker and all other agencies in order to provide a high level of quality foster care to children looked after by Blackpool. The needs of children are central to the Fostering Team's activities and in line with legislation and government guidance.¹

The Fostering Team is responsible for ensuring that foster carers have practical and emotional support, information, advice and training to provide a safe home and nurturing environment for children looked after. Records of Decisions to accept or refuse applicants are maintained by the Fostering Manager and decisions are based on clear eligibility criteria.

The Fostering Team places high importance on the training and support of foster carers, regarding them as part of the professional team entrusted to provide and advocate for the physical, emotional and educational needs of children. The Fostering Team will assist all foster carers in completing the essential training required for the fostering task.

¹ Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011

Qualified social workers within the Fostering Team are registered with the General Social Care Council, and all staff are subject to three yearly CRB checks. The Fostering Manager and Group Manager are suitably qualified and have the relevant experience and knowledge. On going workforce development is a priority within Blackpool Council.

The Fostering Team has a single point of referral and a duty office system that provides advice on all fostering enquiries, fostering placement issues regarding children aged 0 – 17 and for support to foster carers. The staff team keeps up-to-date information on in-house foster care capacity and availability. The Duty Officer is available from 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Thursday and 9.00 am to 4.30pm Friday. An out-of-normal office hour's telephone cover is provided by the Team Manager and Advanced Practitioner. There is other 24 hour support, 365 days a year to foster carers provided by the Blackpool Emergency Duty Service on T: 01253 477600

1.6 Organisational Arrangements and Management Structure

The Fostering Team is located within Children's Social Care, which is under the Directorate of Social Work and Safeguarding Children, Adult & Family Services. There is a transparent senior management structure within the directorate for the management of the Fostering Team. There are clear arrangements in place in the absence of the team manager through the advanced practitioner or the group manager.

The Fostering Team and Fostering Panel is adequately supported by administrative staff. Recruitment of foster carers is overseen by the Fostering Manager. Social workers with case responsibility for children in foster care are located within the borough.

1.7 Services Provided

The Fostering Team is a specialist team made up of qualified and unqualified staff. Qualified staff undertake foster carer recruitment, assessment, training, support, professional development and reviews. They are also responsible for assessing and supporting family and friends as carers. There are processes in place so that the Fostering Team can continually improve effectiveness and efficiency, which in turn will improve service delivery and outcomes for children, their families, foster carers, social workers and other agencies. Unqualified staff are fully involved in supporting foster carers and also in facilitating support groups and consultation groups for foster carers, young people and children.

Once foster carers are approved they are allocated to a supervising social worker (a social work qualified post) who will make regular home visits and telephone calls. Supervising social workers provide physical, financial and practical support to foster carers by offering information, advice, and access to foster carer support groups, training opportunities and equipment.

The Fostering Team delivers specific and general training and also commissions training from other agencies. As well as delivering formal training for foster carers the supervising social workers take on the role of supporting foster carers with their

professional development through the annual foster carer review.

Supervising social workers also ensure children are safe and being cared for properly in terms of their health, education, access to leisure and, where appropriate, having contact with their family. Thus, supervising social workers have a safeguarding role as well as a supporting role.

Foster carer's performance is monitored throughout the year by supervised, planned and unannounced visits and through an annual review.

1.8 Support to Foster Carers

Foster carers are supported by qualified supervising social workers from the Fostering Team. The supervising social worker's role covers a variety of activities including advice, training, practicalities of equipment and finance and assisting foster carers to carry out their task appropriately. The supervising social worker also has a responsibility to ensure that children are safeguarded whilst they are placed with foster carers and as such supervising social workers will monitor and check compliance against the foster carer's written agreement.

All foster carers are encouraged to attend support groups, which enable them to share experiences of fostering and for them to have a forum to network, socialise or raise any issues or good ideas.

We are looking to develop the groups for foster carer's sons and daughters in 2011-2012 which is facilitated by workers from the Fostering Team.

Foster carers and the children placed with them are able to receive support from: Independent Visitors Scheme: Children's Rights Service: Children's Participation Officer: Virtual Schools Officer: Children in Public Care Team (Education): and nurses for Looked After Children (Health). The Fostering Team has access to a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who provide a service for children, foster carers and prospective foster carers; CAMHS also gives advice and support to social workers. In addition to CAMHS, we have access to a Psychologist for Looked After Children and an Educational Psychologist.

Foster Carer Forums are held three times each year, where foster carers are invited to contribute to agenda items which affect the delivery of fostering provision. The Forums are also used as a means for consultation.

Support groups are held throughout the year for Foster carers of pre-school children, Foster carers of Primary School age children, Foster carers of Secondary School age children, Family Friend carers, foster carers of children with additional needs. All Foster carers are welcome at each group in recognition of the common areas for discussion and consultation.

Listening Ear, is a support service where experienced foster carers are able to provide

support and advice to other foster carers.

Awards are presented to carers in recognition of long standing commitment to fostering for Blackpool Council.

Foster Carers achieving NVQ Level 3 Childcare are invited to an awards ceremony.

The Fostering Team provides new European Standard Approved equipment to all carers specific to the requirements of children in placement.

If a foster carer has had a complaint made against them, the Fostering Team can arrange support from an Independent Support Consultant.

The Fostering Team has corporate and individual memberships with Fostering Network and has BAAF membership as an organisation.

Carers are paid a weekly allowance based on central government guidelines. In addition to the basic Fostering allowance they also receive a payment for skills element. Foster Carers receive a minimum amount of £139.00 (per week per child) and up to a maximum amount in some cases of £370.00 (per week per child). For full details on the fee payment structure contact can be made to the Fostering Manager on 01253 477888.

1.9 Support to Prevent a Child's Placement Breaking Down

Where it is in this child's best interest to do so, every effort is made by the Fostering Team to maintain their placement. The following is a range of support offered by the Fostering Team to the child's social worker, the foster carer and the child.

During office hours an immediate visit is made by fostering support workers to the fostering household and the child's social worker is routinely invited to this meeting

Immediate telephone contact is made outside office hours by the Fostering Manager or advanced social work practitioner.

Where foster carers are 'over the usual fostering limit', additional support can be accessed to undertake domestic chores so as to allow foster carers more time to spend with the children in their care.

There are a range of support groups for foster carers that include: children at different stages of school curriculum; for foster carers of older children who are preparing to leave care and for carer's of children with additional needs. There is also a Children in Foster Care consultation group.

1.10 Types of Placement

The development of a robust Fostering Strategy in 2011 will help to inform how foster carers will be recruited and placements will be delivered in the coming years. Currently,

there are the following types of fostering provision:

Short Term

Duration: Up to two years

Purpose: Provide substitute care whilst Care Plans are formulated or a specific piece of work is carried out e.g. parental assessment

Long Term or Continuing Care

Duration: Beyond two years

Purpose: Stable placement until leaving full time education and into adulthood

Young Parent & Child

Duration: Flexible

Purpose: Support parent, monitor parenting skills

Short Break / Family Link

Duration: 1-28 days, may be one off, or a planned series of placements.

Purpose: Provide short break for full time carer. Most commonly used for children with additional needs.

Foster Carer Day/Respite Support

Duration: Variable hours per day or for a period of days or weeks

Purpose: To support foster carers who need extra help with the placement or who are requiring a break from the fostering task

Emergency

Duration: Up to 28 days (may then evolve into short term or other type of placement)

Purpose: Unplanned admission into care.

Preparation for Independence

Duration: Ongoing

Purpose: Care and support young person in developing independent living skills

Kinship/ Family Friend Carers

Duration: Ongoing

Purpose: These carers are part of a child's extended family or friendship network and as such are able to provide continuity of care and promote their family identity

Remand Foster Care

Duration: Usually for periods of up to four weeks, however, can be longer.

Purpose: To provide care to young people who are on remanded to the Court.

Permanent Fostering

During 2011 we will be developing services for younger children (those under 10 years) who may not have a plan for adoption but need a sense of security. We intend to review the need for permanent foster carers when children will be matched and placed with permanent foster carers who do not have other children placed.

1.11 Numbers of Foster Carers

At July 2011 there were 137 Blackpool registered fostering households, which includes 24 Kinship/Family Friend foster carers and 5 Family Link foster carers, 2 foster carers from a minority ethnic background, 3 same sex couple foster carers and 31 single carers. There has been an increase of 26 fostering households since 2010 when the number was 109.

1.12 Numbers of Children Placed

At July 2011 there were 276 children placed with Blackpool registered foster carers. There has been a significant rise in the number of looked after children since January 2008 which has had an impact on placement choice for some children and the authority having to purchase fostering placements from independent agencies. During 2012-13 the Fostering Strategy will be driving force to develop our recruitment and retention of foster carers.

2.1. Foster Carer Recruitment, Assessment, Preparation and Training

The Fostering Strategy will form the basis of continued service provision whilst addressing predicted future needs it will also be the foundation for the annual Marketing Plan.

From April 2010 to March 2011 42 foster carers have been approved. There were 6 de-registrations/resignations of foster carers.

Generally, campaigns builds on existing links with the local community to ensure the service recruits carers from a wide range of backgrounds. Throughout the year the service has run carefully coordinated campaigns, which include a wide range of media such as poster sites, leaflet-drops, community events, information sessions, transport and press advertising.

The Fostering Team has developed a range of materials in order to aid the recruitment of foster carers. The website provides a comprehensive and wide range of information for potential foster carers including a questions and answers page and it has an on-line application registration link. www.Blackpool.gov.uk/fostering

2.2 Enquiry, Preparation, Assessment, & Approval of Foster Carers

Enquiry

Following an initial enquiry, applicants will first speak to a qualified social worker on the telephone that will collect basic information including details about accommodation, family composition and motivation. If both the enquirer and the social worker are in agreement that a home visit should take place to gather and/or share more information a designated fostering worker will undertake this task within 7 working days. Once the Initial Visit Form has been completed the Fostering Manager will make a decision to progress the enquirers or not. If a decision is made to continue with a full assessment, the applicant will be invited to attend the preparation group to learn more about the fostering task.

Preparation Groups

All applicants are required to undertake an initial training preparation course. This may begin before, at the same time or after the assessment has begun. The purposes of this are:

- To ensure that applicants are well informed about fostering generally.
- To train and prepare applicants for the tasks involved in fostering.
- To help applicants make appropriate decisions in relation to their application.

- Written feedback concerning the applicant's participation in preparation groups is provided by the trainers and incorporated into the assessment.

Course trainers include at least one qualified social worker with substantial experience of foster care training, who possesses in-depth knowledge of the agency and one experienced foster carer. There is a multi-disciplinary approach to this course, where education and health are invited to lead sessions. The course content is constantly evaluated, improved and updated. As a minimum standard, training always includes the following topics:- Safe caring: Attachment: Separation and Loss: Child Development: Understanding the Effects of Child Abuse: Introduction to Child Protection: Understanding and Managing difficult behaviour: Identity: Discrimination: Routes into Public Care: Diversity: Nutrition: and Education

Assessment

On successful completion of the Preparation Group, potential applicants will meet with the social worker over a period of time to work together gathering evidence about their skills and knowledge which are relevant to fostering and to offer them advice.

The social worker prepares a report that will be shared with the applicants before being submitted to the Fostering Panel with a recommendation for approval. The Panel will make a recommendation after considering the report and talking with the social worker and/or the prospective foster carers who are always invited and supported to attend Panel. The Agency Decision Maker makes the final decision. There is an appeals process for those foster carers who are not approved.

2.3 Annual Reviews

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 require that foster carers are reviewed annually to consider their continuing suitability. Additional reviews can be completed at any time if there is a change in circumstances or an issue of concern.

The Independent Reviewing Office Corporate Parenting is Chair person of the Review.

The review is usually carried out at the foster carers' home. It is a two way process in which the foster carers can express their views about the Fostering Team or other services provided from within Children's Social Care and where the supervising officer can address any area of concern about the foster carer. Looked after children, over 5 years of age, in placement at the time of the Review will be consulted for their views.

A report of the First Annual Review is presented to Fostering Panel for consideration and their recommendation. The Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision on their approval and registration

Each foster carer's annual review includes an appraisal of training and development needs, which is documented in the Review Report. If a foster carer fails to consistently complete training they will be non-compliant with their Foster Care Agreement and their

circumstances may be presented to Fostering Panel as part of the Review and quality assurance process.

2.4 Foster Carer Training

Training is an integral part of a foster carer's role and begins during the preparation and assessment process. The Fostering Team has implemented the Children's Workforce Development Council's "Training, Development and Support Standards for Foster Carers." Every foster carer must complete the Children's Workforce Development Induction Programme. There is a Training Calendar that is reviewed on an annual basis for foster carers.

Foster carer training is integrated within the Children's Workforce Development Unit Training Programme and includes opportunities for joint training with social workers, children's homes staff and other agencies. An 'E' programme is available on line for foster carers and many foster carers access this resource.

Each foster carer has a written training profile detailing all training undertaken and future training needs. All training fits within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. Where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, both will be required to complete all mandatory training.

2.5 Family and Friends Care/Connected Persons Care

If a child is looked after by the local authority, placements may only be made with a relative or friend if they have been assessed and approved as foster carers under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

An assessment of the friends/relatives capacity to care for the child will be completed by the Fostering Team. This is a process that involves a number of home visits, and the completion of a BAAF Form F. This goes into detail about things such as the person's background and childhood, previous and current relationships/marriage, support networks, experience as a parent(s), their relationship with the child's family and other relevant issues. Health references and CRB enhanced checks are required for each applicant who will need to provide details of their income and names of people who are prepared to act as referees for them.

Once the assessment is complete, the fostering worker will make a recommendation to the Fostering Panel with a written report. Prospective foster carers will be invited to attend the Fostering Panel if they would like to. The Fostering Panel makes a recommendation to the Decision Maker who has the final decision about whether or not someone is approved as a foster carer. The Decision Maker is the Service Director of Social Work and Safeguarding.

Children's Services have a duty to visit looked after children. The child's social worker will visit the child within the first week of the child being placed, then at least every 6 weeks.

A fostering social worker will visit the foster carer's home every 6 weeks. The fostering social worker will explain the process of annual reviews of foster carers' approval, and how foster carers are offered opportunities for training and development.

Children's Services have a duty to review a looked after child's care plan within 28 days of the child becoming looked after, then within the next 3 months and then every 6 months until the child is no longer looked after.

Family/Friend foster carers will be supported by a fostering social worker or support worker who will visit on a regular basis. Carers may be required to attend training courses and will be offered the opportunity to attend support groups.

A weekly allowance is payable to meet the costs of caring for the child. The weekly allowance is currently:

- 0-4 years: £142.00
- 5-10 years: £156.00
- 11-15 years: £175.00
- 16+ years: £200.00

Child benefit and child tax credit are not payable to foster carers.

3.0 Numbers, Relevant Qualifications, Vetting and Experience of Staff

The Fostering Team has a complement of full and part time staff and has two designated admin support posts. The Fostering Service considers itself to be a learning environment and encourages continuous accredited professional development for all staff. The Fostering Team promotes the understanding of the Social Model of Disability and aims to ensure that every child placed has access to a full range of appropriate community based experiences, services and facilities and so there is a designated social worker within the team who takes the lead role in co-ordinating provision to children with additional needs.

There are the equivalent of 7 full time established posts made up of qualified supervising social workers and unqualified family support workers. Supervising social workers are experienced in undertaking assessments and they closely supervise the support workers. Supervising social workers in the Fostering Team hold professional qualifications (DipSW, CQSW, CSS or other international accredited social work qualifications) and they are all registered with the General Social Care Council. All staff have Criminal Record Bureau checks that are renewed on a three yearly basis and references are held on file with recent photographs.

The Fostering Manager holds a relevant management and professional qualification. (NVQ Level 4 Management & CQSW)

4.0 The Fostering Panel

Blackpool's Fostering Panel meets monthly on the last Tuesday and includes people with a wide range of experience and interests. The Panel is constituted according to the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards (2011). There is an Independent Chairperson, and Deputy Chairperson; both of whom are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake their role. The Panel has core representatives from health, education, an elected member, two social workers, the Fostering Service manager and a foster carer from another fostering agency. Legal and medical advice is available through legal services and the medical advisor.

The Panel considers new approval applications for foster carers, family and friend's foster carers and the annual review of existing foster carers. Once approved by Blackpool, foster carers can only work for this authority. We encourage and support applicants and existing foster carers to attend the Panel to which their report is presented. The Panel can only make a recommendation. It may either recommend:

- Approval of the applicants as foster carers according to the assessing social worker's recommendations
- Approval of the applicants as foster carers but specify more restrictive matching criteria
- Not recommend applicants for approval
- Ask for further work to be undertaken and for the matter to be brought back to Panel once this has happened.

The Panel's recommendations go to the Service Director who is the Agency Decision Maker for Blackpool. All decisions are notified to the applicants in writing. If applicants disagree with the decision they can follow the Representations/ Complaints procedure.

If a foster carer decides to resign, a brief report will be made to the Fostering Panel and their approval will be terminated and their name removed from Blackpool's Register of Foster Carers. If the Panel considers that a foster carer is no longer suitable, the Panel can recommend to the Agency Decision maker that they are de-registered. The Fostering Panel produces quality assurance reports to the Agency Decision Maker.

Panel Meetings have a written record with discussions on each set of applicants (or foster carers) recorded separately in order that they can be placed on individual files.

The Fostering Panel also has a quality assurance function and the Panel Chair provides written reports to the Service Director. The Fostering Panel may also be approached by the Fostering Manager for advice

The Fostering Panel met on 12 occasions from April 2010 to March 2011

4.1 Numbers of Complaints and Outcomes

Blackpool has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are deal with. From April 2010 until 31st March 2011 the complaints made about the Fostering Service, (including Foster Carers) are as follows.

From	Number of Complaints	Number Upheld	Number Resolved in 28 Days
Children/Young People	4	1	1
Foster Carers	1	1	1
Other Professionals	2	1	1
Children & Young Peoples Parents	2	0	1
Other, For Example: Members of the Public, Members of Parliament	2	0	0

This Statement of Purpose was approved by

Title Service Director Social Work and Safeguarding

Name Janet Hambly

Signature

Date

Title Executive Director of Children, Adult & Family Services

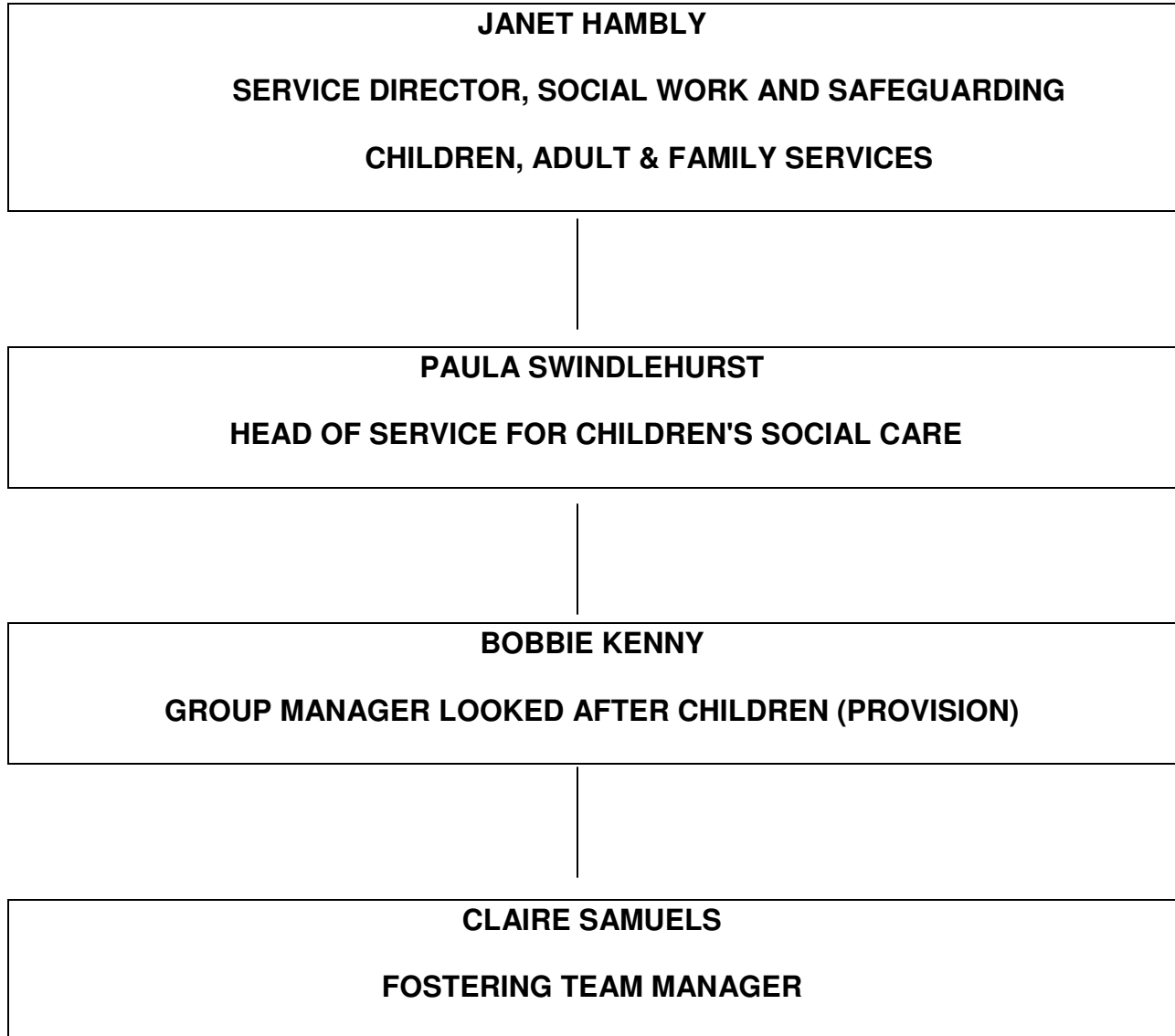
Name David Lund

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 1

FOSTERING SERVICE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



APPENDIX 2

STAFFING STRUCTURE

**CLAIRE SAMUELS
FOSTERING MANAGER**

**KATE WILSON
ADVANCED PRACTITIONER**

**LAURA CARR
SOCIAL WORKER**

**GAIL DAVIES
SOCIAL WORKER**

**HELEN HUBERT
SOCIAL WORKER**

**DAVID INNES
SOCIAL WORKER**

**JOANNE JAMESON
SOCIAL WORKER**

**KATHRYN PETTIGREW
SOCIAL WORKER**

**JOANNE WALCH
SUPPORT WORKER**

**KIRSTY FISHER
SUPPORT WORKER**

**CLAIRE GREENWOOD
SUPPORT WORKER**

APPENDIX 3

REGULATION

Blackpool Fostering Team is regulated by Ofsted and our inspection reports can be accessed on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Their contact details are below:

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Office of the Children's Rights Director
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Aviation House
125 Kingsway
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Free Phone: 0800 528 0731
Website: www.rights4me.org

FOSTERING TEAM RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL

Paula Swindlehurst
Head of Children's Social Care

FOSTERING TEAMS LOCATION

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