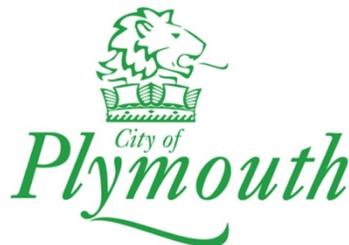




plymouth fostercare

Statement of Purpose – Part I: Version for publication

November 2010



Introduction

Plymouth City Council believes that most children's needs are best met within their own families. However, we recognise that this is not possible for some children and in such cases we will endeavour to find high quality local placements within a family setting. Plymouth Fostercare provides such alternative care arrangements and offers alternative family environments for children and young people up to 18 years old, either on a temporary or permanent basis.

The principles underpinning Plymouth Fostercare are the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Appendix E). Plymouth Fostercare is governed by a set of [National Minimum Standards] for fostering services, which were implemented in 2002 . As such it is regulated and inspected by [Ofsted].

As part of that legislation, Plymouth Fostercare is required to produce "a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide". This statement of purpose must outline the vision of the service, its structure, the identified needs and our policies and procedures.

A children's guide is available for all young people fostered through our service and includes details of our service and information for young people to help them get the best out of their care, including how to access an advocate and how to make a complaint.

If you have any comments about the fostering service, Plymouth Fostercare would ask you to contact us direct on 01752 308777.

You can also contact Ofsted on 08456 404045. Alternatively, you can write to them at:

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Statement of purpose

Aims and objectives

Plymouth Children and Young People's Trust Plan 2008-2011 states that:

"We want all our children to live and grow, achieve and exceed in their hopes for the future."

"To achieve our vision we need to provide high quality and appropriate services in the right place and at the right time. The focus of all the work is to provide integrated, locally delivered children's services that focus on prevention, and timely targeted intervention."

The fostering service supports and contributes to this mission by providing an effective, efficiently managed, high quality foster care service within available resources, to meet the needs of children as identified through the stages of assessment planning and review, and to aim to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care.

The fostering service has a key role in supporting Plymouth City Council as [Corporate Parent] for children who cannot live with their own families and for whom it shares [Parental Responsibility].

Plymouth City Council upholds the right of every child to grow up in a stable and loving family environment. We recognise that a child's best interests are usually met within their birth family or extended family. Mindful of this we provide services to keep children at home or reunite children with their families at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

Where a child or young person cannot live with their family, we aim to provide high quality care in a family setting.

The fostering service is working towards the five key outcomes for children:

Be healthy

- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well being

Plymouth Fostercare makes an important contribution to the Council's overall performance agenda.

Core aims

- to meet the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002, Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and accompanying schedules 1- 8
- to meet the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and other good practice standards
- to have in place a recruitment strategy, which ensures that a range of foster placements is available to meet the needs of all children requiring foster care and to develop any identified gaps in recruitment
- to target recruitment to those prospective foster carers most likely to meet the needs of children in care, including those in need of short break care (respite)
- to work closely with the independent fostering agencies to ensure a range of placement choice

- to ensure that prospective foster carers from all backgrounds are welcomed without prejudice regardless of ethnic origin, faith, age, sexual identity, gender, disability, background, marital or employment status and considered on their individual merits
- to ensure that the recruitment process is respectful, fair and timely
- to ensure that the preparation process prepares foster carers as well as possible for the task of caring for children in care
- to ensure that foster carers are supported and supervised in their task of caring for children in care
- to engage in a child-centred matching, introduction and placement process
- to develop working partnerships that are inclusive of children and young people; their families; foster carers; child care social workers; and colleagues in other agencies including Health, Education and alternative providers as appropriate
- a commitment to ongoing training and learning of foster carers and supervising social workers within the service

Core objectives

- to provide high quality care in a family setting which enables children and young people to develop, explore and reach their full potential
- all foster placements will respect and promote children and young people's ethnic, cultural, faith/religious, sexual identify, gender and linguistic backgrounds
- to recruit more foster carers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds so that Plymouth Fostercare can offer appropriate placements to children and young people
- to inform future recruitment strategies by an analysis of current and future needs of relevant children in need
- to continue to provide a high quality service that values diversity
- to ensure that applications to become a foster carer are processed in a timely manner from the point of contact to approval following fostering panel recommendation, as appropriate
- to ensure that all foster carers, including family and friends, are aware of both the role and support function of supervising social workers
- to ensure that staff across the integrated Department of Services for Children and Young People work together to provide the best possible service that is child-centred and supportive of families and foster carers
- to provide a smooth, transitional service for young people moving into adulthood
- to review and update policies, procedures and appropriate processes to ensure they meet statutory requirements and reflect best practice
- to develop and maintain a quality, comprehensive training programme for foster carers and supervising social workers within the service that provides generic learning as well as specific learning relevant to individual children's needs
- to offer a payments structure that enables carers to develop their fostering careers by recognising and rewarding their skills, experience and ability to care for children with more complex needs

Principles and standards of care

Plymouth Fostercare's work is underpinned by the following standards:

- children are best cared for in a stable and caring family setting which encourages and promotes continuing links with their own family and community
- children have the right to be safe, secure and protected. Plymouth Fostercare have a clear policy against corporal punishment, including smacking, slapping, shaking and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment

- children have the right to be listened to and treated equally and fairly. Plymouth FosterCare will actively engage children and young people in decisions affecting them and in the general operation of our services
- every child is valued for who they are. Plymouth FosterCare will make every effort to provide children with suitable placements and carers will support and promote a child's sense of identity, self respect and diversity
- children's growth and development will be safeguarded within a robust care planning cycle. Foster carers, supervising social workers and children's social workers will work together in partnership to enable children to reach their full potential
- Plymouth FosterCare values the work foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people. Foster carers are part of the professional network who support and protect the child
- Plymouth FosterCare will provide appropriate levels of support and supervision. We are committed to the ongoing professional development of carers and will review training provision on a regular basis
- Plymouth FosterCare will make every effort to retain children in the same school

Services provided

This section outlines the services currently provided by Plymouth FosterCare.

Plymouth FosterCare provides support to mainstream foster carers and specialist provision, including support to children with complex or specialist needs, Connected Persons (family and friends carers) and [Private Foster Carers. Supervising social workers provide assistance in maintaining placements through the recruitment, approval and training of new foster carers and the ongoing training, support and review of existing carers.

Foster placements (including emergency placements)

Plymouth FosterCare offers placements for children and young people of all ages, either on a temporary or permanent basis. At any one time there are approximately 140 approved foster carers supporting 420 children and young people.

Emergency placements are carefully monitored to ensure that they do not progress beyond their agreed time span.

Specialist carers

Children and young people with particularly challenging behaviour and complex needs are offered placements with specialist carers (known as 'Band 4 carers' due to their position in the Payment for Skills scheme, in recognition of their skills and experience). These carers are paid a fee equivalent to a full-time salary in addition to fostering maintenance allowances and are entitled to an enhanced support package. Additional support is provided through [Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Education (CAMHS)].

Family and friends carers

Friends or family members occasionally act as foster carers to specific children and young people. At any one time there are approximately 16 family and friends carers supporting 18 children. Financial support is offered to these carers and they are subject to the same assessment and approval process as all other foster carers. All family and friends carers have a supervising social worker and can access the same training and support as all other foster carers.

Children with special health needs

Plymouth FosterCare offer placements to children with special health needs. This includes full-time care and short breaks to support the child's parent or main carer.

Respite care

Plymouth Fostercare offer a range of respite foster placements. These are offered to support children to remain with their family or main foster placement.

Permanent foster placements

Children and young people are sometimes cared for in permanent foster placements. It may be that they cannot return home to their families for very serious reasons, or it may not be appropriate for them to be adopted or the subject of another legal order such as a [Special Guardianship] or [Residence Order]. Children and young people in permanent foster care are usually, but not always, subject to [Care Orders].

Private fostering

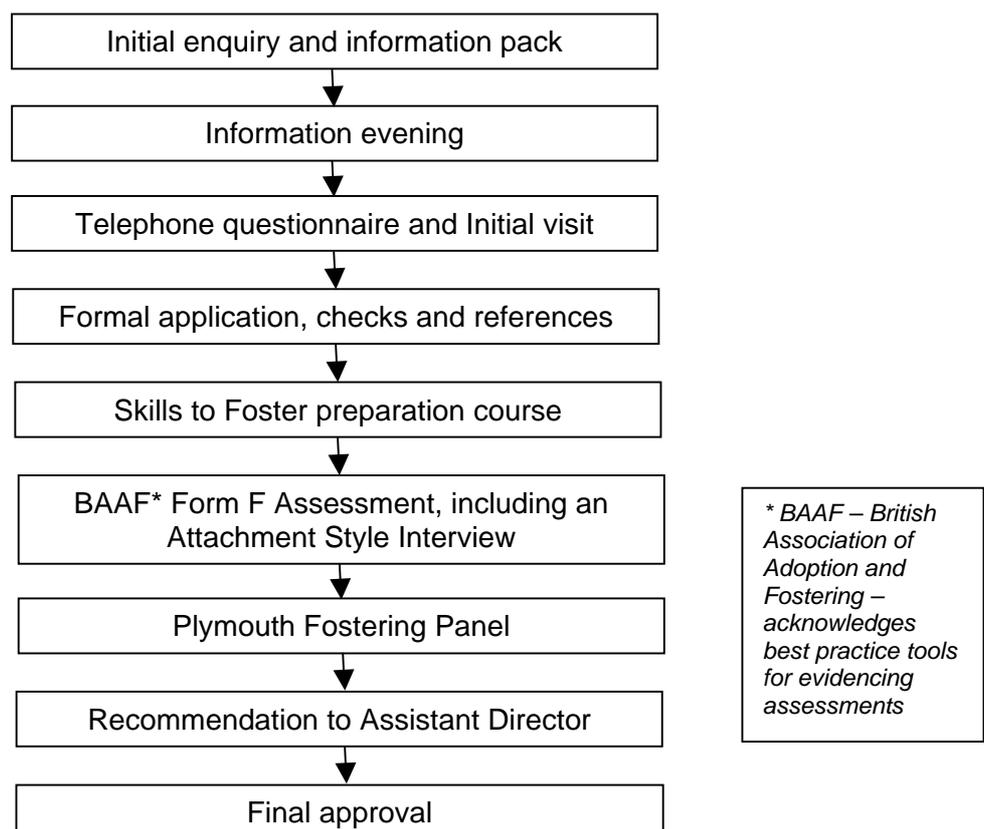
Plymouth Fostercare has a well developed private fostering service to safeguard and support children and young people who are cared for outside of their immediate family as a private arrangement. The private fostering service carries out extensive work to raise awareness of private fostering to the public and professionals across Plymouth. It also assesses and supports private fostering arrangements, as well as providing consultation to other professionals. Plymouth Fostercare has one social worker dedicated to private fostering, who works in partnership with a support worker.

Support to foster carers

Recruitment and approval process

Prospective foster carers from all backgrounds who can offer children a stable home will be welcomed without prejudice. They will be treated fairly and with respect and kept informed throughout the process. Plymouth Fostercare has a written recruitment strategy and undertakes regular needs-analyses of children in care to identify future needs and inform the recruitment process.

The following flowchart provides an overview of our recruitment and approval process. Plymouth Fostercare has a dedicated Recruitment Co-ordinator to process initial enquiries from prospective foster carers, and two dedicated social workers to assess new foster carers. From initial enquiry the normal recruitment process should take approximately six months. More detailed information is included within Appendix C.



Training for foster carers

Plymouth FosterCare recognises that fostering has become increasingly demanding and complex. The service is committed to providing good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers. Training is viewed as an important element of support to foster carers and comprehensive pre and post approval training is available on an ongoing basis.

Training is provided to:

- help foster carers to develop and improve their skills
- improve knowledge, develop and refine skills
- establish an explicit, positive framework of values, which promotes equality of opportunity
- encourage foster carers to be aware of the effects of discrimination in all parts of the community, recognising that they care for children, many of whom face discrimination as a part of everyday life
- ensure that all foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm
- help foster carers to promote the health and education of children and young people

Foster carers are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own professional development. This is practically supported through the creation and updates of individual training profiles as part of annual reviews. Children and young people have the opportunity to feed back their views about their carer to the foster carer's annual review.

The training programme is reviewed constantly and is also subject to a formal annual review.

In addition to being expected to complete the mandatory training courses for their payment Band, all foster carers on payment Bands 2 and above must complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Standards for Foster Carer Training, Support and Development. New foster carers approved since April 2008 must complete the Standards within a year of approval. . Plymouth FosterCare is providing a range of support to ensure that foster carers can achieve this such as workshops and mentoring from other carers.

Support for foster carers

Plymouth FosterCare values the work foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people in their care. Appropriate support for foster families is important to a successful placement.

Plymouth FosterCare provide creative and flexible support arrangements for children and young people and their foster carers. Identifying and ensuring the necessary level of support occurs when a child or young person and foster family are 'matched' at the placement planning stage. This support is then monitored and adjusted throughout the placement.

Support arrangements include:

- supervision and support from a qualified and suitably experienced supervising social worker
- frequent visits and regular telephone contact from the supervising social worker
- individual membership of the Fostering Network
- a Payment for Skills scheme consisting of four payment levels. Each level includes an allowance for the child that covers the cost of caring for them, and the higher levels include a reward payment for the foster carer. The Fostering Payments booklet is updated annually and distributed to foster carers
- a comprehensive post-approval training programme
- access to respite care when assessed as needed (the level of respite entitlement depends on the carers' payment Band and is described in the Management, Support and Supervision of Foster Carers policy)
- access to support groups and development of groups for family and friends carers

- access to help from the Plymouth Looked After Children in Education team to support foster carers in negotiating with schools and promoting children and young people's educational needs
- therapists from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services team, who provide expert guidance and support to foster carers of children and young people who are experiencing serious emotional difficulties. Individual therapy is offered where appropriate
- access to the Designated Nurse for Children in Care
- access to support workers who are available to provide planned and flexible support
- access to the Foster Carer Support Team, a telephone helpline run by experienced foster carers
- a 'Mingle Kidz' support group for foster carers' own children
- access to a secure online community enabling foster carers to communicate with staff and one another
- access to a computer provided by Plymouth City Council (agreed on a case by case basis for family and friends carers)

Review of foster carers

Plymouth FosterCare has a detailed procedure for completion of reviews of foster carers, which reflects the law, regulations, National Minimum Standards and good practice guidance. The fostering service has an Independent Reviewing Officer to conduct all foster carer reviews.

Foster carer reviews follow an appraisal format, assessing the carer's competencies and training needs. Prior to the review, the views of social workers, foster carers and children who have been in placement are sought. Foster carer reviews typically take place annually. However, Plymouth FosterCare procedures outline situations that could prompt an early review.

Listening to foster carers

Plymouth FosterCare has a range of mechanisms designed to elicit feedback from foster carers. The foster care forum meets monthly and gives foster carers the opportunity to contribute to service development and meet with representatives from across the Department. Foster carers are regularly invited to join working groups on topics such as fostering allowances and contact procedures.

Feedback questionnaires are sent to foster carers periodically. Questionnaires are distributed to children, parents and foster carers at the end of each placement. A further questionnaire is sent to carers at the end of their fostering careers. Feedback is also sought as part of the foster carer review process. All feedback is collated and discussed at management meetings.

Keeping children safe

Plymouth FosterCare works hard to ensure that children in foster care stay safe and are aware of their rights. The right to be safe, secure and protected and the right for adults to listen and for young people to be treated equally and fairly are fundamental principles. Procedures are in place to ensure that foster carers have sufficient information about every child in their care, to enable them to keep children safe and meet all their needs.

Plymouth FosterCare has a robust system for checking prospective carers' backgrounds and their suitability to care for vulnerable children. Elements of child protection and how to provide a safe caring environment are reinforced throughout assessment, approval and training for foster carers. All placements have a Safer Caring Agreement in relation to the household and each individual child in placement.

Plymouth FosterCare has a policy against corporal punishment including smacking, slapping, shaking and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment. Plymouth FosterCare also have guidelines for the acceptable use of sanctions within the home. Every complaint against a carer is treated

seriously and are subject to Department of Services for Children and Young People's Complaints and Representations Procedure. (Trix link to chapter on complaints 1.6.1)

All allegations that carers have abused or ill treated a child in their care are subject to [Child Protection] procedures, in compliance with the Children Act 1989. The supervising social worker will continue to offer support to the foster carer through any process of investigation into an allegation or complaint.

Foster carers are trained to recognise incidents of bullying and work with children and significant people such as their social worker, teachers or family to resolve any problems. (Trix link to Personal Care and Relationships chapter 5.1.1)

Listening to children and young people

The matching process seeks to take into account the views of young people and their families when identifying a suitable placement.

Children and young people's views about the standard of their care are sought as part of the statutory review process. As standard practice, reviews are shared with supervising social workers.

Children have direct feedback into the foster carer's annual review about the quality of service they receive and any issues they may have. They are also asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of each placement.

The Participation Officer, based in the 16+ Service, works closely with young people to develop services to include them in service development, including supporting young people to attend fostering information panels, interviews for new staff members and prospective foster carers.

Complaints

Plymouth City Council believes that service users, their carers and their families have the right to express their views and make complaints, suggestions or representations about the services that are arranged and delivered, and that by doing so we can improve quality and effectiveness.

Suggestions and complaints are viewed as a positive means of ensuring the quality of service is reviewed, both at a local level and through the formal complaints procedure.

A complaint is a verbal or written expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet. It may be about the organisation, about the implementation of decisions, about the quality or appropriateness of services, or their delivery or non-delivery.

Representations include enquiries, suggestions and statements about such matters as the availability, delivery and nature of services and will not necessarily be critical.

The complaints procedure is provided to all staff and foster carers, is readily available on request and is available on the Plymouth City Council website at www.plymouth.gov.uk/socialservicescomplaints. It describes how to make a complaint and specifies how complaints are handled. Information is also provided on other avenues of complaint where appropriate. The complaints procedure is accessible to people with a disability or sensory or learning impairment and to those whose first language is not English.

Children have access to an independent advocacy service in accordance with the "Get It Sorted" regulations.

Between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 eight complaints were made about fostering service. All of these have now been resolved.

For further information or advice about the Complaints and Representations procedure please call the Customer Relations Team on 0800 068 1249.

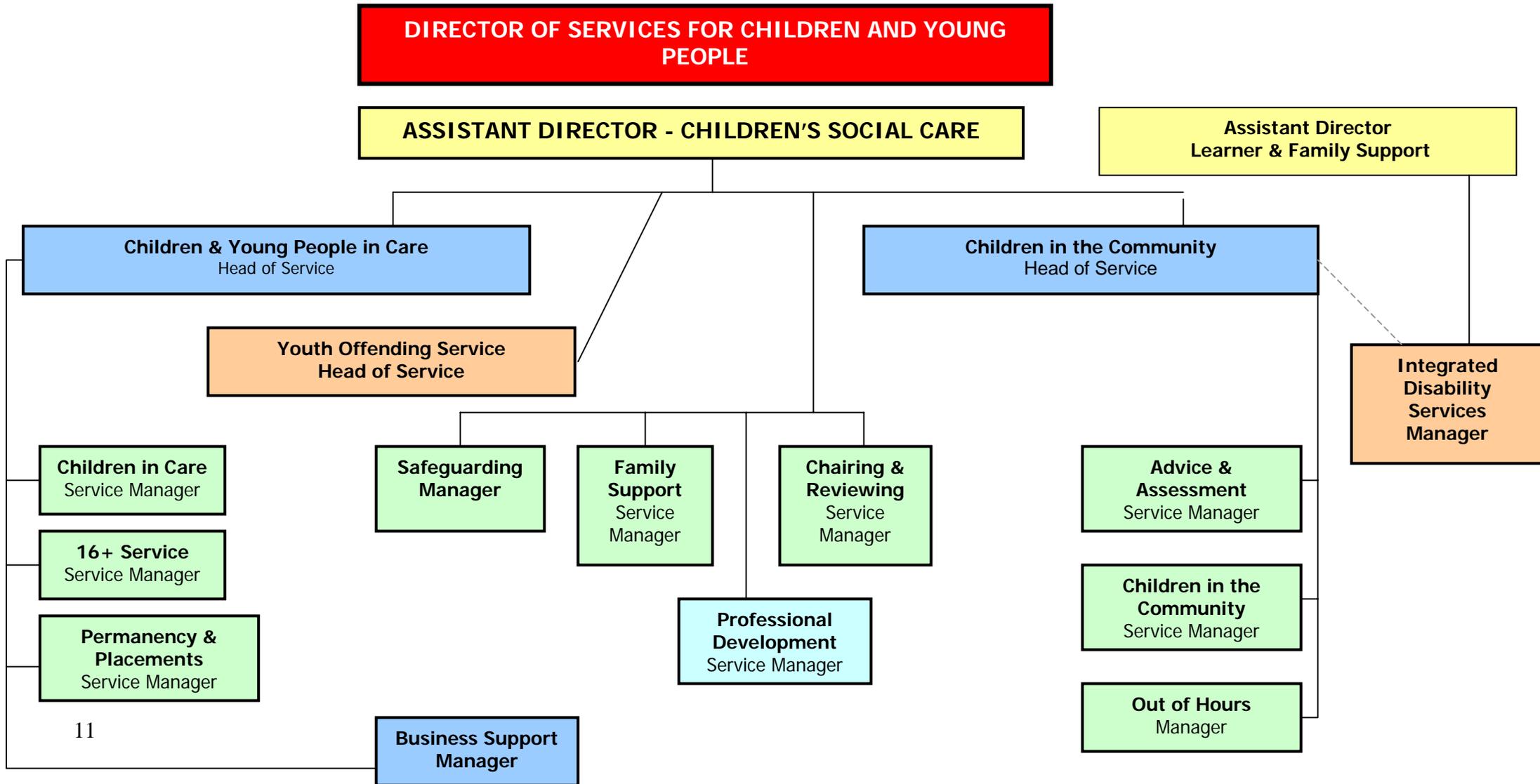
Useful contacts

Further information about fostering can be found at the following websites:

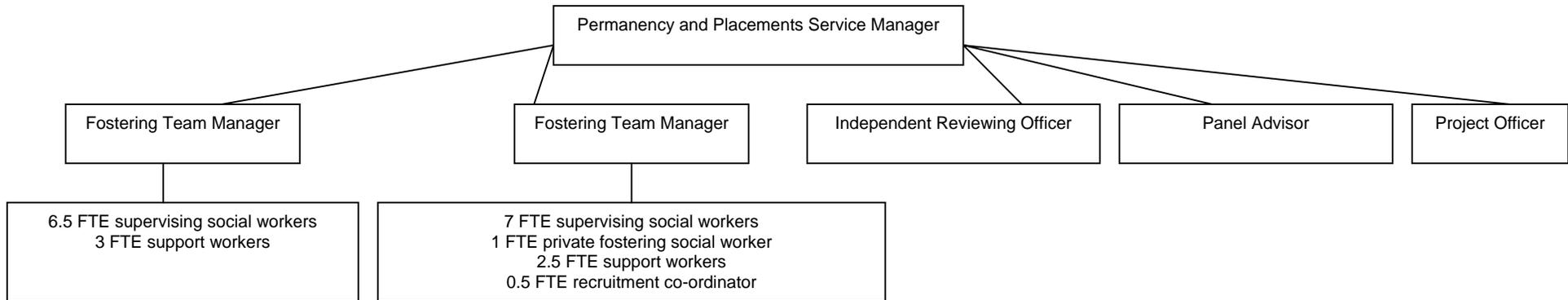
- [The Fostering Network] - www.fostering.net
- British Association for Adoption and Fostering - www.baaf.org.uk
- Fostering Information Line - www.fostering.org.uk
- Right Here, Right Now! (Who Cares? Trust) - www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

Appendix A – Structure charts

Children’s Social Care divisional structure



Plymouth Fostercare structure



In the event of wishing to speak to a manager please ask for the Duty Fostering Manager. If that Manager is unavailable then you will be put through to the next available Manager who will answer your query.

Appendix B - Experience and qualifications of current staff

This has been removed for reasons of confidentiality. Please contact Plymouth City Council for further information.

Appendix C - Detailed recruitment process

On making an enquiry about fostering, prospective carers will be sent a copy of our fostering information pack which includes a DVD about fostering in Plymouth as well as an invitation to the next information evening. At the information evening, prospective carers will have an opportunity to ask to be contacted by a fostering social worker. If so, a supervising social worker will be allocated to perform an initial visit. The social worker contacts the prospective carer within a week to complete a detailed questionnaire over the telephone and performs the visit within the following fortnight.

After the visit, if the social worker and prospective carer both wish to proceed and the Plymouth FosterCare Team Manager agrees with the initial assessment then a social worker will be allocated to undertake a fostering assessment depending on the needs of the children currently needing foster homes.

All prospective foster carers must attend 'Skills to Foster' preparation/assessment training. This covers the responsibilities of being a foster carer and working with Plymouth FosterCare.

At the beginning of the assessment process, the prospective foster carer completes an application form, giving detailed information about themselves and their family together with consent for Plymouth FosterCare to complete the necessary statutory checks and enquiries to ascertain their suitability to foster, as set out below.

Plymouth FosterCare obtains checks from:

- Police - the [Vetting and Barring Service] (incorporating probation)
- Health Authorities
- Education
- Employers
- Cafcass
- NSPCC
- Social Services
- and any other relevant agency

Police checks are obtained on all members of the household aged 16 years and over.

Applicants are required to have a full medical examination completed by their GP.

Applicants will be asked to identify at least two personal referees who will provide written references and be interviewed as part of the assessment process. These references are confidential and will not be disclosed to the foster carer.

Once the checks are completed, a qualified social worker from Plymouth FosterCare will carry out a full assessment which will consist of visit by the social worker to the applicant's home to meet and collate information. Information will be collected about all members of the household and the applicant's experience, skills and competency in relation to fostering. An attachment style interview will also be carried out.

The information obtained forms the basis of an assessment report. Plymouth FosterCare uses the Form F format published by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). Applicants are

encouraged to engage fully in the preparation of the form, including writing sections of it themselves where possible.

A full assessment will normally be completed within 6 months. However, applications from prospective foster carers can be halted at any stage if there are concerns about their suitability.

The content of the Form F assessment report, excluding all references, is shared with the applicant and then presented to a fostering panel. To assist in the decision making process, applicants are required to attend the panel meeting. The fostering panel makes recommendations about the suitability of applicants to be approved as foster carers and the extent of this approval, including recommendations as to the age range, numbers of children and type of placement.

The Agency Decision Maker receives the recommendation of the fostering panel and makes the final decision about approval on behalf of Plymouth FosterCare. Applicants are informed of the decision verbally and in writing, normally within a week of the panel date.

All information obtained about prospective foster carers is held on file. In accordance with the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act, some of this information can be viewed. However, this depends on the identity of the person or organisation making the request and the nature of information they want to see. Additional information is contained in the leaflet "Access To Personal Records".

Appendix D - Fostering Panel membership

Panel Chair

Gail Birch, Independent Practitioner (Previously Cornwall county council safeguarding manager)

Panel Advisor

Denise Latimer

Services for Children and Young People representative

Alf Clibery, Supervising Social Worker, Fostering Team

Elected member

David Stark, Councillor

Representative from another fostering agency

Scott Wickers, Service Manager, Torbay Accommodation Services

Independent representatives

Kathy Ball, Plymouth Looked After Children Education Team

Nicky Edwards, Service User and Advocate

Harriett Knights

Tracy Trevethan

Legal adviser

Pauline Franklin, Senior Lawyer

Health representative

Di Dymond, Named Nurse for Children in Care

Appendix E - Principles underpinning the service

Children Act 1989

The paramount duty under the Act is to safeguard the welfare of the child, but in discharging that duty *we must provide services to enable children to live with their families where at all possible*. However, if this cannot be achieved and a child needs to be in care, we must:

- work in partnership and encourage parental involvement
- promote contact with parents and family
- take the child's wishes and feelings into account
- recognise and provide for the child's cultural, ethnic and religious needs

Children with disabilities should be:

- treated as children first and foremost
- be included and have access to the same facilities and opportunities as other children
- receive services which emphasise and maximise their abilities

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child: Summary of relevant articles

- Article 3: All actions concerning a child should take account of their best interests. The State should provide adequate care when parents or others responsible fail to do so
- Article 5: The State has a duty to respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and the wider family to provide guidance appropriate to the children's evolving capabilities
- Article 6: Children have an inherent right to life and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development
- Article 8: The State has an obligation to protect and if necessary re-establish the basic aspects of a child's identity (name, nationality and family ties)
- Article 9: A child has a right to live with their parents unless this is not considered to be in the child's best interests. The child has a right to maintain contact with both parents if separated from one or both, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests
- Article 19: The State has an obligation to protect children from all forms of maltreatment by parents and other responsible for their care and to carry out preventative and treatment programmes in this regard
- Article 20: The State has an obligation to provide special protection for children who do not have a family environment. The State should also ensure that alternative family care or care in an institution is available, taking into account the child's cultural background
- Article 21: Adoption should only be considered when it is in the best interests of the child and with all the necessary safeguards and authorisation by the competent authorities

**Appendix F: Summary of complaints received
between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010**

	How many complaints did you receive?	How many of these were upheld?	How many and what percentage were resolved in 28 days?		How many are ongoing?
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>
Children/young people	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Foster carers	3	N/A	2	66%	0
Other professionals	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Parents	4	N/A	3	75%	0
Others, for example members of the public or Members of Parliament	1	N/A	1	100%	0