

## **Worcestershire Children First Fostering**

### **Statement of Purpose (Covid 19)**

#### **Introduction**

This Updated Statement of Purpose (covid 19 October 2020) should be read in partnership with the Statement of Purpose (2019). This revised covid-19 statement of purpose sets out how Worcestershire Children First Fostering have adapted and responded to the delivery of our services in the context of minimising the spread of infection within our community and workforce during the covid-19 pandemic.

This revision sets out the way in which we will be providing business continuity during the covid-19 pandemic.

This addendum incorporates the updated changes to Legislation effective from 25/09/2020 *The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus)(Amendment) Regulations 2020* & The three sets of Regulations setting out the tiers of restriction 14/10/2020:

1. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (Medium) (England) Regulations 2020 ([SI 2020/1103](#))
2. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (High) (England) Regulations 2020 ([SI 2020/1104](#))
3. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Local COVID-19 Alert Level) (Very High) (England) Regulations 2020 ([SI 2020/1105](#))

#### **Staffing**

There are no changes to the management or team structures. There has been some changes in how we carry out our duties and we have taken advantage of some of the opportunities to undertake work with families directly and face to face and remotely where appropriate.

Team Members who may need to continue to be working from home due to periods of isolation will be supporting their field working colleagues.

### **Ensuring children in our care are happy, healthy and safe**

#### **Visits to Foster Families during the Pandemic**

Face to face visits are required as part of the fostering service support and supervision to carers. There is a statutory duty to do so; and as such there are appropriate exemptions to allow this work to be taken out in the homes of foster and kinship carers to fulfil our legal duties under The Health Protection Regulations relating to Tier 1, Tier 2 & Tier 3 (Schedule 1, Exemption 4).

The WCF Fostering Social workers will undertake visits to provide support, supervision and monitoring of the wellbeing of the children looked after by Worcestershire Foster carers.

Any face to face visits that are considered necessary will be undertaken by staff who will adhere to Public Health guidance and ensure they sanitise, use PPE and

maintain social distancing to protect members of your household and staff from risk of infection.

### **Transitions for children**

Children's transitions to new placements or to permanence including adoption should not be delayed due to the new Health Regulations, and this is stipulated in each regulation under schedule 1 which allows exemption to fulfil a legal duty and specifically pertaining to adoption introductions.

### **Keeping in touch**

Keeping in touch telephone/video calls will be made regularly to foster carers and to the children and young people. The need for visits to children and carers will be determined against a risk criteria in order to respond to any immediate problems and also provide support to prevent risks escalating and ultimately prevent placement breakdown.

A detailed Visit and Keeping in Touch protocol has been developed as a Practice Standard guide for workers which can be located on the Practice Standards Intranet for staff.

Social Care staff are aware that KIT calls are a self-reporting line of communication and of the need to manage the potential for increased risk within the conversation that takes place.

Social Care staff will use their professional communication and assessment skills to judge the level of risk from the general conversation that takes place and the manner in which children, young people and parents engage in the conversation.

All children in care will have regular Keep in Touch Calls and visits from their allocated social worker and access to Mind Of My Own. All children have been provided with copies of the Children's Guide and will also be reminded about how they can access a Children and Young people's advocate.

### **Family Time**

Worcestershire Children First are committed to supporting its Looked After Children. We continue to be committed to ensuring that some face to face family time takes place where it is safe to do so, those families who ordinarily have contact once a month or more will continue to have one face to face family time per month with the remainder continuing to take place virtually. Those who have family time less frequently than this will continue with their usual timetable, however the length of the session will likely be reduced.

We have written further to the parents of those children whom have supervised contact to advise that, in line with government guidance and to ensure the safety of all, there remains the need to undertake specific measures to ensure that face to face family time can safely take place. Failure to adhere to these rules will result in face to face family time being suspended.

It is recognised that for some children a mix of both face to face and virtual family time has been preferred and most able to meet their needs. Throughout the coming weeks we shall be seeking feedback from all those who have been affected by changes to their family time. This will help inform what learning we can take from family time during covid and how we develop family time as we move forward in the best interests of the children and young people that we work with.

Worcestershire children first foster carers are to continue to promote family time including virtual family time in line with the care plan for each child going forward.

### **Support and Supervision of Foster carers**

- We will keep in touch with foster carers by phone, video and face to face visits so we can continue to check in with foster carers and everyone in their household and provide any support that may be needed in a timely manner.
- We are able to help foster carers if they are unwell or are self isolating and need assistance to get essentials for your family such as shopping and medicines if you don't have support in your network to do this.
- Foster carer formal supervision will continue to take place at a mutually convenient time with your supervising social worker virtually or face to face. This is an opportunity for meaningful and supportive conversations for you as foster carers.
- A duty social worker and duty team manager are available each day should the foster carer not be able to get in touch with their allocated supervising worker. This support can be accessed by calling 01905 845335 or 01905 844766.
- The Emergency Duty Team continue to operate out of hours and they can be contacted for urgent out of hours support on 01905 768020.
- We can refer for ISL Health and Wellbeing team for therapeutic telephone advice or support from a psychologist or specialist social worker/mental health practitioner.
- Annual reviews will continue to be undertaken within 1 year of anniversary of approval where it is reasonably practicable to do so. Annual review checks which must be renewed every 3 years are:
  1. DBS Check
  2. Local Authority Check
  3. Medical

### **Learning and development of Foster Carers**

Worcestershire Children First Fostering recognise that foster carers continue to need training as an important part of their role as a foster carer. Foster carers are encouraged to continue to develop skills in line with individual learning and development plans.

All mandatory and developmental training has been replaced with eLearning or interactive video courses.

Full details of the training and how to access this can be found at the following webpage:

[http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20726/training\\_and\\_support/2080/training\\_and\\_development](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20726/training_and_support/2080/training_and_development)

### **Support groups & Foster Carer Forum**

Virtual foster carer support groups continue to take place on a monthly basis using video conferencing to help you keep in touch with each other and we will let you know about how to join these if you would like to take part. A new Kinship Support Group has also been established taking place bi-monthly.

The Foster Carer Forum continues to take place quarterly where all approved carers can raise matters for discussion and all are encouraged to get involved either through foster carer members of the forum to raise a matter on your behalf or by getting in touch with Sue Fletcher, Recruitment & Retention Manager [sfletcher7@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk](mailto:sfletcher7@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk)

### **Recruitment and Assessment of New Foster Carers**

Worcestershire Children First Fostering continue to encourage new applications to become foster carers for all ages of children and sibling groups. Worcestershire Children First Fostering have continued to recruit, prepare and assess new fostering applicants and continue to welcome enquiries from people who are motivated to care for a child through foster care.

WCFF have a virtual recruitment process where enquirers can get in touch with the recruitment team and engage in preparation learning and support sessions remotely.

WCFF are continuing to assess new applicants through creative social work solutions combining written, video assessment and fieldwork visits to progress assessments of suitability to foster. An assessment plan will outline how the assessment will be carried out using a combination of remote and face to face assessment sessions.

### **Fostering Panel & Agency Decision Making**

Worcestershire Children First Fostering Panels now take place as 'virtual meetings' using video conferencing. The fostering panel continue to consider new fostering applications, first annual reviews or changes of approval. Panels continue to be independently chaired by the Panel Chair or Vice Chairs and the panels have been quorate.

The amendments to the legislation does allow a degree of flexibility for quoracy- if there is a reduction in the panel members ability to participate in fostering panel,

then Worcestershire Children First Fostering will firstly reduce the number of attendees to be quorate.

Local fostering panels also continue to operate virtually by Team Managers chairing reviews.

Medical self-declarations are no longer being used, therefore a full medical report by the GP must be obtained as soon as is reasonably practicable and inform final decision regarding approval.

Agency Decision Makers:

<b>Fostering and Adoption decision makers</b>	
<b>Area of Decision Making</b>	<b>Agency Decision Makers</b>
Approval, termination and review of foster carers	Tori Lynch Judy Mayo Ammanda Walsh Selina Rawicz Kevin Bryan Mark Tustin Dan Adams Ruth Hill Karen Green Sally Branchflower Suzie Simms
Placement under Reg 24 (temporary approval of foster carers)	Fostering ADMs: Laurie- Mo Gullachsen, Registered Manager for Worcestershire Children First Fostering  Back up only: On call GM
Placement under Reg 25 (foster to adopt)	Laurie- Mo Gullachsen, Registered Manager for Worcestershire Children First Fostering  Back up: Tina Russell, Director of Safeguarding, Worcestershire Children First
Exemptions from the usual fostering limits for foster carers living in Worcestershire.	Emma Brittain, Assistant Director  Back up: on call GM
Agreement to the long-term matching of children with foster carers and Adoptive Carer.	Maria White, Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Worcestershire Children First  Back Up (for external matches only): Adam Johnston, Assistant Director, Through Care and Sufficiency, Worcestershire Children First.

Care Plan of Adoption	Tina Russell, Director of Social Care and Safeguarding, Worcestershire Children First  Emma Brittain, Assistant Director, Family Front Door & Partnerships, Worcestershire Children First  Back Up: Adam Johnston, Assistant Director Throughcare, Worcestershire Children First
Adoption and SGO allowances where carer meets criteria and financial support is within the financial assessment amount	Relevant Assistant Directors
Adoption and SGO allowances exceptions	Tina Russell, Director of Safeguarding, Worcestershire Children First
Agreed 22.07.2020	

### **Family Placement Service**

Worcestershire Children's First Fostering will continue to offer new foster placements to children who are in need of a foster placement.

Children will be matched to appropriate carers who are able to meet their assessed needs.

Referrals for a fostering placement will continue to be made via the Placements Team.

A duty business support officer, duty social worker and duty manager will have oversight of the family placement duty service. Children will be offered placements where foster carers can meet the children's needs as set out in the placement request form (PRF).

All possible precautions to reduce infection for children and carers will be made when introducing children to new foster placements. Placement planning meetings will take place virtually as soon as is reasonably practicable.

### **Kinship assessments**

- All new and ongoing work on Viability and Kinship Assessments will be completed using a combination of remote and face to face work.

- All full kinship assessment referrals will be prioritised for allocation based on the needs of WCF service.
- Due to the capacity of the service, Private Law and SGO assessments which are not in care proceedings may be put on hold in order to prioritise care planning for the most vulnerable children
- If a Viability and Kinship Assessment has been completed and is positive, then a social work home visit must be completed to assess the home environment and ensure that these are suitable before a child is placed.

## **Viability/Kinship Assessments in Care Proceedings Cases**

### **Viability assessments**

All new viability assessments will be completed face to face or remotely using professional judgement about best practice in the individual circumstances. As a minimum, a verifying home visit must be undertaken for any cases requiring a child to be moved.

### **Full kinship assessments**

All full kinship assessments referrals will be prioritised for allocation based on the needs of Worcestershire Children First service.

Where an assessment is prioritised for allocation, an assessment plan will be drawn up with the applicants to set out clearly the plans for how the applicants will be prepared for the task of kinship care and fairly assessed, which will include the use of face to face and virtual interviews.

Where appropriate, the assessment plan agreement should be filed with all parties where the matter is in care proceedings to try to reduce the likelihood of an assessment being contested on the grounds of the assessment methodology.

It is an expectation that there should be at least 1 visit undertaken face to face for each assessment to meet the applicants and assess the home environment. This visit will be planned as part of the mid-point assessment review and may be undertaken by a fieldwork social worker if the assessing social worker is deployed to WFH during the current service protocol.

Timescales for kinship assessments may need to be extended to allow for delays in statutory checks to be completed by health and other public organisations who may be impacted by the current situation.

National guidelines will be followed in relation to statutory checks to satisfy fostering regulations or special guardianship regulations.

### **Independent Advice, Mediation and Support**

All Approved Foster carers have membership of Foster Talk. Membership provides foster carers with unlimited access to support which is set out at the following link [www.fostertalk.org/virtual-pack/](http://www.fostertalk.org/virtual-pack/)

- 24 Hour Legal Advice Line

- Arrest & Interview Assistance
- Tax/Accountancy/Benefits Support Line
- General Fostering Advice Helpline
- 24 Hour Counselling Support Line
- 24 Hour Medical/First Aid Advice
- Education Support Helpline
- Personal Finance Advice – Mortgages, Pensions, Savings etc.
- Quarterly FosterTalk Magazine
- Monthly “SmallTalk” e-newsletter
- Over 4500 fantastic discounts on lifestyle products and services
- Downloadable fostering information including guidance around providing education at home.

### **Compliments, Comments and Complaints**

There are no changes to the arrangements for Compliments, comments or complaints.

### **Payments to Foster Carers**

Foster carers will continue to be paid in line with their approval and for the children in their care.

Foster carers are asked to submit any additional expenses through the foster carer portal.

Foster carer remittances are also now available electronically.

### **Quality Assurance**

#### **Service User Feedback**

- The views of children and young people are important to us. Children who are looked after by us will be asked to feedback to during the Keeping in Touch Conversations, during visits and as part of their foster carers’ annual review as well as through Mind of My Own app. The independent reviewing officer for the child/ren will also seek feedback at the end of a placement and share this with the agency.
- Worcestershire Children First will seek feedback during the pandemic from children’s parents , their social workers, and other professionals and use this to feedback any learning to individual fostering households including discussing any training needs. It will also monitor whether there is any learning for the whole service.
- The agency has written information (children’s guides) for children and young people to tell them about fostering services. This includes information on how to complain and every child in the care of Worcestershire Children First Fostering should have a copy of the guide.

- Team Managers will monitor the lived experiences of children during the pandemic and take into account a range of information to inform whether priority visits or further intervention is needed to prevent placement breakdown and undertake audits which look at the lived experience of the child in the fostering household.
- Feedback is sought from foster carers as part of monitoring children's progress. This focuses on their experience of supervision and support. This feedback is discussed with the carers supervising social worker and also collated to look at learning and development for the service.
- Children and young people living in any household we are assessing will be interviewed as part of the assessment and they will be asked to feed back to the foster carers' annual review.
- Carers, social workers, birth families and other members of the fostering household will continue to be asked to contribute to the foster carers' annual review. As well as providing individual feedback, this is reviewed to look for trends or patterns about service delivery.
- All carers are asked to provide feedback about the experience of attending fostering panel
- Consolidation meetings are held and the information from these is reviewed so that trends or patterns can be identified. This information then becomes part of the improvement cycle for the service
- All carers are advised of the agency's complaints and compliments procedures and given information about how to make a complaint. Learning from compliments and complaints is feedback into the service
- WCFF will consult with the Children In Care Councils on their experience of our services and any developments within the agency.

### **Covid-19 KPIs**

During the pandemic, there will be some changes to the Key Performance Indicators for the service.

#### **1. Covid-19 Keeping in touch calls**

Regular calls are to be made to the foster carers to have meaningful conversations and to ensure that children and foster carers have enough support and that placements are not at risk of disruption.

#### **2. Priority visits**

Visits will be undertaken in line with priority criteria being applied by case holding and fostering team managers. This replaces the KPI for face to face support and supervision visits.

#### **3. Assessment Timescales**

KPIs for these services are reduced to the national minimum standards of from 8 months from application. This replaces the service KPIs, however:

- a. Where possible, kinship viability assessments will be completed within 2 weeks.
- b. Where possible, kinship assessments will be completed within 12 weeks.
- c. Where possible, mainstream assessments will be completed in 16 weeks.

#### **4. Foster carer Supervision**

Regular supervision will continue to take place at a mutually convenient time. Where possible, this should take place no less frequently than 12 weeks.

#### **5. Unannounced Visits**

Unannounced visits do need to be reintroduced to standard practice. Where these are undertaken, appropriate precautions and PPE will be used.

#### **6. Supervision of Staff & Case Management**

Where possible, supervision of staff will continue to take place in line with practice standards of the service.

Should there be reduced capacity in the management team, then supervision will be reviewed in line with best practice.

#### **Audit**

Monitoring of the service will continue to take place in line with the regulation 35.

Thematic audits will continue be undertaken as identified by the registered manager.

Looped & moderated audits will also take place to ensure consistent quality.

#### **Arrangements for Reviewing this Statement of Purpose:**

This Statement of Purpose (Covid 19 Oct 2020) will be revised in line with national and local guidance no later than 30/03/2021.



Signed:

Laurie-Mo Gullachsen, Registered Manager

Worcestershire Children First Fostering

Date 22/10/2020

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Adam Johnston', written over a horizontal line.

Adam Johnston, Responsible Individual

Worcestershire Children First Fostering

Date 23/10/2020