

Foster Carer & Supported Lodging Carer Membership and Allegation Support

Service

Specification

**Introduction:**

Essex County Council (ECC) is one of the largest county council’s in England, in one of the most populous, complex and diverse counties of the country.

ECC is dedicated to improving Essex and the lives of our residents. Our ambition is to deliver the best quality of life in Britain. We will achieve this by providing high-quality, targeted services that deliver real value for money.

We want Essex to be a county where innovation brings prosperity. We know our county faces a set of unprecedented challenges. If we are to meet these challenges we need new thinking and innovation to ensure we can use our resources in the best possible way for the people of Essex. We must harness the power of new ideas to secure a more prosperous Essex.

ECC vision for Essex 2013/17: As a county council, our most important role will be to establish the conditions for innovation and prosperity in our economy, and to lead innovation in the public services.

Throughout our work, we will build on the strengths of our county. This means harnessing the energy and passion of people across Essex who work hard for their families, build careers and businesses and shape their communities.

The Essex Fostering Service, the Access to Resources Team and their remits form part of the overarching placement strategy for children looked after by ECC. ECC approve Essex (in-house) foster carers and supported lodgings carers.

The Essex Fostering Service provides all in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers with membership and access to an independent service which offers support and advice to in-house foster carers, helping them to maintain a safe place for children and young people to live, thrive and achieve their full potential. Essex County Council intends to add supported lodgings carers to this membership.

NB: All data and information contained in this document relates to in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers.

The Essex Fostering Service also provide independent advice and support to Essex

foster carers and supported lodgings carers. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide access to independent advice and support to Essex foster carers who are subject to an allegation. This element fulfils the requirement as set out in point 22.9 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011.

**Background:**

It is vital as a Local Authority that Essex County Council strives for the best fostering service to provide safe, stable and first-rate in-house foster care where children and young people are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals.

Essex Fostering Service and Access to Resources Team vision is to provide a safe, stable and caring environment which exceeds required standards in meeting the needs of all children and young people in care enabling them to realise their potential and to enhance their life opportunities.

The team recruits, approves, trains and supports foster carers and supported lodgings carers whilst working in partnership with community social workers, therapeutic services, corporate parenting and other appropriate lead agencies to ensure continued support to and retention of in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers.

Table 1 shows the numbers of Looked After Children, Essex Foster Carers and Supported Lodging Carers in Essex in 2016.

Table 1:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Total Essex Looked After Children** | **Number of Essex Foster Carers** | **Number of CYP living in Essex short, med, long placements** | **Number of Supported Lodging Carers** | **Number of CYP in Supported Lodging placements** |
| **1021** | **822** | **544** | **37** | **45** |

There are on average up to 20 requests per annum for independent support following an allegation.

**Aims and Objectives:**

This Service Provider will work with Essex Fostering Services and Access to Resources Team to promote the vision and support the successful recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers and help them to maintain a safe place for children and young people to live and thrive.

The Service Provider will work closely with the Essex Foster Carers Association to ensure local knowledge and information is shared.

The aims of this service are:

* To provide independent advice and support to all approved Essex County Council Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Carers and their families when an allegation has been made concerning a standard of care or safeguarding issue.
* To befriend, advise and support at a time of crisis and isolation. This service is to be extended to the Children of the Foster Carers Supported Lodgings Carers concerned including a tailored counselling service.
* To provide a proactive service to all Essex Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Carers that improves and raises the standards of care and help to prevent future issues developing.
* To engage with Foster Carers and Supported Lodgings Carers to promote this service and enable them and their families to access the provision to its full extent.
* To also provide advice and support to all foster carers and supported lodgings carers during out of office hours on matters which are not an emergency and do not fall within the remit for the emergency duty service.
* To influence national and local government policy on fostering and related services using various digital and communication channels
* To support the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Essex through the national promotion of initiatives for fostering.
* To make available a range of support services, including, but not limited to
* access to legal and welfare advice,
* information and advocacy

**Workforce:**

All staff providing this service will be suitably qualified and have subject matter expertise and understanding of fostering. Where legal or medical advice and support is delivered then this should be provided by suitably qualified people.

**Key Tasks:**

* The Service Provider will support foster carers and supported lodgings carers by providing timely easily accessible advice, support and involvement for the following issues:
* **Legal**, including:
* Attendance by a qualified and experienced solicitor if carer or any Household member, are required to attend a police interview as a result of an allegation
* Legal protection insurance cover
* 24-hour legal helpline for expert advice on allegations
* Confidential stress counselling service.
* Financial cover for legal expenses if a criminal prosecution or civil proceeding is brought against you or any of your household as a result of an allegation.
* Cover for Staying Put, Supported Lodgings providers, current foster carers and former foster carers who look after a young person up to the age of 25.
* To provide ongoing support to foster carers and supported lodging providers following an allegation being made
* Personal Finance (Benefits, Income Tax and National Insurance, Mortgages, pensions, accountancy, retirement planning)
* Insurance backed guarantee for 24hrs legal protection.
* Counselling
* Abuse (fostering a child who has been sexually abused or allegations against Foster Carers)
* Health and Wellbeing
* Placements
* Training and events
* Publications (e.g. books, leaflets, magazines and guidance)
* Discounts, including retail and financial offers
* Promoting recruitment
* Promoting and developing networking support
* Influencing service development
* Provision of a 24 hour free phone helpline
* Initial response within 24 hr including weekends and bank holidays
* Support worker allocated within 24 hrs.
* Support worker to provider confidential telephone and/or face to face service

**Eligible groups and individuals:**

# All Essex Approved Foster Carers

* All Essex Approved Supported Lodging Providers
* All ‘own’ Children of Foster Carers and Supported Lodging Providers
* Social work and fostering professionals

# Geographical coverage:

Essex Fostering Services comprises of 5 fostering teams (Colchester, Tendring, Mid, South and West Essex) within the ECC quadrants (North, Mid, South and West Essex) who support and supervise approved foster carers across in Essex (excluding Thurrock and Southend unitary areas). The Access to Resources Team 16+ is one team based at County Hall in Mid Essex but it covers the whole county.

ECC is committed to providing a range of foster carers and supported lodgings carers from a wide variety of backgrounds enabling the Essex Fostering Service and to the Access to Resources Team to match foster carers and supported lodgings carers with the specific identified needs of the children and young people requiring placements.

The service delivery area is within the administrative boundaries of Essex.

**National and Internal Legislation and Guidance**

The Independent Fostering Network Service will adhere to the requirements of:

* The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and

Wales) 2011

* The Essex Fostering Statement of Purpose
* The Supported Lodging Statement of Purpose
* The Fostering Services Regulations 2011
* The Supported Lodging Policies and Procedures
* Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures (SET

Procedures)

* Information Handling Policy, including Information Governance and Data Management

**Outcomes:**

**ECC Corporate Outcome 4:** People in Essex live in safe communities and are protected from harm

All in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers are confident and able to provide a safe, stable, caring environment on behalf of ECC to meet the needs of the children and young people in care enabling them to realise their potential and enhance their life opportunities.

**Time frame**

The Service will commence 1st August 2017 and terminate on 31st July 2022.

The contract duration is five (5) years with the option to extend up to a further two (2) years at the sole discretion of the Authority.

**Performance and Reporting**

The Service Provider will produce and present a quarterly and annual report (broken down into the quadrant and service information – i.e. fostering/supported lodgings carers) to the Head of Fostering and Adoption and External Placements and the Service Manager Fostering (the Commissioners) to include but not limited to the following areas over the life of the contract:

* % and no. of Essex (excluding Thurrock and Southend) in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers accessing the service, method of seeking support (e.g. telephone, email, website) type of service required, type of support provided
* % and no. of foster carers and supported lodgings carers, children, young people accessing the service, method of seeking support (e.g. telephone, email, website etc.), type of service required, and type of support provided
* % and no. of in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers providing feedback and summary of outcomes
* no. and subject of compliments and complaints and actions taken

The Service Provider will work with the Commissioner to ensure ongoing joint review of performance measures and delivery outputs during the contract period to ensure continuous improvement and a flexible and collaborative approach is undertaken.

The Service Provider must evidence involvement in:

* Promoting recruitment
* Promoting and developing networking support
* Users influencing service development
* Locality partnership working, signposting to other local community voluntary
* Promoting the allegation support
* Actively seeking user satisfaction on an ongoing basis

NB: There is an example reporting template available as part of this service and ECC is happy to work with you to amend where appropriate.

The Service Provider will work with Essex County Council to identify and implement engagement and improvements to services offered.

The Service Provider will advise all in-house foster carers and supported lodgings carers of its own complaints procedure, and the Commissioners Consumer Care Policy, recording and logging all complaints and responses and compliments and make available to commissioners within the quarterly and annual reports.