



Fostering Prospectus

St Christopher's Fostering

Prospectus and Statement of Purpose

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St Christopher's Fellowship – A Continuum of Care

St Christopher's has been a leading voluntary provider of services for 135 years and specialises in working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. We provide care, accommodation, advice, education, training and continuing support, helping to really make a difference.

We are proud of our history of delivering the kind of help that everybody needs; someone who'll listen, someone who cares, a safe place to sleep, a better future... to those who need it most: the young and homeless.

We are equally proud to be a fast-growing charity, adapting to meet the changing needs of our service users in the 21st century.

Our approach to care is holistic, and we are constantly working to improve and extend our wide range of excellent services.

We use research and evidence-based methods to meet the needs of all the people who require our support. We know from experience that by drawing on sound academic research, our staff are better able to meet the complex needs of our service users and our work is more effective.

In all our developments, we involve the people who use our services, or who have used them in the past.

Introduction

St Christopher's Fostering Prospectus and Statement of Purpose has been produced to meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Services Regulations (England, 2002; Wales, 2003), issued in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000, requiring fostering service providers to produce a Statement of Purpose that clearly sets out what services are provided for children and young people who are placed by the fostering service, and including references to any additional services, for example education and therapeutic services.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated annually.

Offering a New Home

Fostering is a natural development for us. It is one more way of making a difference to young lives and offering a real chance of a better future.

In 2006 we acquired Elite Fostering, an independent fostering agency. Its team of carers and staff has many years of childcare experience. We believe our combination of professional skills and experience, together with our commitment to training and support, will produce the very best outcomes for children and carers.

In 2006 we established a partnership with Southend. Our Southend offices opened in February 2007.

Our Mission and Vision

Our mission is:

To support and encourage children, young people and vulnerable adults to recognise and achieve their potential.

Our vision is to do this by:

Providing a wide range of services including

- ✦ fostering
- ✦ children's homes
- ✦ family support
- ✦ services for young runaways
- ✦ advice and guidance for young people leaving care
- ✦ supported housing and hostels
- ✦ support for young people living in their own accommodation
- ✦ educational support
- ✦ advice on training, employment and health
- ✦ supported training
- ✦ service improvement consultancy

Listening and learning from our own experiences and those of others in order to:

- ✦ Ensure that the views of the people who use our services are central to everything we do;
- ✦ Provide an innovative and diverse range of services

Leading the field as a beacon of best practice

Being a trustworthy and reliable partner offering professional relationships and consistent service delivery

Being responsive to opportunities and taking responsible risks

Being an excellent employer whose staff are informed and empowered in their decision making and who are passionate about positive outcomes

OUR VALUES

Our values establish the ways in which everyone at St Christopher's will go about their work. They are our ethical code. We are all expected to abide by them at all times.

Safeguarding the people who use and provide our services

Tenacious in our pursuit of excellence and cost effectiveness and always challenging mediocrity and complacency

Consultative and always ready to listen and learn from people who use our services, from our staff and from our partners

Honest and always acting with integrity

Respectful of diversity, equality and individuality

Innovative in our search for new and better ways to do things

Supportive to people who use, provide or fund our services

St Christopher's Fostering

At the core of our service is the provision of a range of foster placements with skilled, trained carers who can work with children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs.

As well as rigorous assessment of our carers, we provide active support, consultation and ongoing training. We regard our carers as our partners in the provision of high quality care for children, many of whom have suffered early neglect and maltreatment.

We train our carers in those methods best suited to the needs of the children in their care.

Our team of qualified professionals provides high levels of quality support to all our foster children and carers.

We endeavour to offer placements that match the child's culture and origins in the belief that children should have the opportunity to live in a family environment that reflects their identity and background.

We match all our placements with great care, assessing the needs of the child and the skills and experience of the carer to ensure that fostering is a positive experience for children and carers.

We work in close partnership with carers, families and local authorities to ensure the best outcomes for foster children and carers.

We encourage contact, where appropriate, with families and friends.

We help children to achieve their educational goals and develop the skills they will need for independent living.

Working with Local Authorities

We work with local authorities to provide caring and safe placements for children and young people. St Christopher's supports foster carers from a wide variety of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds who are able to look after children and young people of all ages and needs.

Many of our foster carers, who previously worked through the Elite Fostering agency, are based in south London, but building on local authority partnerships, including Southend, we are actively working to extend our range of fostering services as well as the geographical spread of carers.

Statement of Purpose

St Christopher's Fostering aims to promote

- ✦ excellent care in a family environment for the children and young people placed with St Christopher's foster carers
- ✦ understanding and respect for the racial, cultural and religious backgrounds of children and young people
- ✦ understanding of the disability, gender and sexuality needs of children and young people when considering placements
- ✦ an approach to foster care that is child/young person centred
- ✦ St Christopher's approach to education in residential care is given as an example of good practice in the white paper Care Matter: time for change
- ✦ a commitment to the recruitment of carers from diverse backgrounds
- ✦ effective 24 hour-a-day support for foster carers, children and young people
- ✦ good communication with local authorities, other professionals and the birth family as essential to good practice
- ✦ commitment to ongoing learning and the training of foster carers
- ✦ commitment to using research and evidence based methods to ensure the quality of the fostering service
- ✦ commitment to evaluating outcomes of the services we provide

St Christopher's Fostering Services: Placements

Placement Matching

Good placement matching and support to carers are the keys to good fostering. We work with local authorities to assess the needs of children and young people carefully before the placement. Our assessment of carers is being enhanced by using an evidence based assessment method, developed over many years by the Lifespan Research Unit at Royal Holloway, University of London. The assessment helps us to match children and young people with carers and tells us the best way to support each of our carers.

All our placements are guided by foster care standards set out in the Children Act 1989, the National Standards for Foster Care and Code of Practice 1999, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Fostering Regulations 2002.

Placements Available

- ✦ Assessment
- ✦ Short term
- ✦ Bridging placements
- ✦ Long term
- ✦ Short break/respite care
- ✦ Emergency placements
- ✦ Independence and aftercare
- ✦ Sibling groups
- ✦ Parent and child
- ✦ Disabilities
- ✦ Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Although we are a comparatively young fostering agency, we endeavour to provide a range of placements across the age spectrum, from baby to teenage placements.

Assessment

Our links with experts in the field, including the Lifespan Research Team at Royal Holloway, enable us to offer research and evidence based assessments of children, young people and their families.

Short-term, Task Centred and Assessment

As well as providing supportive care for a few weeks or months, our short-term carers can also provide a secure base for children who need an assessment. If it is agreed, we can provide psychiatric, psychological or therapeutic consultations to guide the development of a continuing care plan.

Bridging Placements

A bridging placement is usually part of a longer-term plan for the child or young person. Our carers work with children and their families towards reunification with their birth family or joining a permanent new family or moving on to independent living.

Long Term/Permanency

Some carers welcome the commitment of offering a long-term or permanent home to a child.

Emergency and Respite Care

Weekend, holiday and other occasional or regular placements can be provided where our foster carers work alongside full-time carers to provide short-term support to the family and child, including children with a physical or learning disability.

Many of our carers are able to accept unforeseen or emergency placements for individual children or sibling groups.

Independence and Aftercare

St Christopher's Fellowship's long history of providing services to young people in care includes leaving care services and supported housing that prepare young people for independence. These services include residential after care service to three local authorities and floating support service to a number of authorities across London. They draw on the resources of St Christopher's Education, Training, Employment and Health team. Our special expertise in this area enables us, through outreach support, to ease the transition for young people into independent living.

Sibling Groups

We are committed to ensuring that sibling relationships are maintained, whether this is best served by them living together or in neighbouring foster homes.

Parent and Child Placements

Placements for mothers (or fathers) and their child are an invaluable resource. Our foster carers are able to provide support and guidance and to help parent(s) develop their parenting skills. In agreement with the local authority, formal assessment of parenting ability can be undertaken by St Christopher's staff and consultants.

Disabilities

Several of our carers have expertise in caring for children who have a physical or learning disability.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Many of our families are trained and experienced in offering a safe refuge for children from other countries who may have suffered trauma. They are supported by well-established networks that can ensure that their particular needs are provided for. Our Education Support Service is available to help with the provision of appropriate educational opportunities.

Other Services for Foster Children and Carers

Social Work Service

We aim to tailor our service according to the needs of each individual child.

All children and young people placed with St Christopher's Fostering should have their own social worker from the placing authority, who will maintain contact with them throughout their placement, conduct statutory visits and make care planning decisions with and for them. In exceptional circumstance, St Christopher's may be able to assist by undertaking some of these roles through a specifically allocated social worker if this is funded by the placing authority.

In addition to the child's social worker, St Christopher's appoints a supervising social worker to support and supervise each foster carer to provide the best possible experience for every child.

Our supervising social worker will

- ✦ maintain frequent contact with the foster carer and children in placement by means of frequent visits, telephone calls and email
- ✦ provide support, guidance and support to the foster carer
- ✦ participate in out-of-hours support to foster carers
- ✦ coordinate respite care provision and other support services as appropriate
- ✦ make unannounced visits to the foster home
- ✦ liaise with other professionals who may be involved in the care plans for the child
- ✦ identify foster carers' training needs
- ✦ keep good records in regard to the placements.

Educational Support Service

St Christopher's is dedicated to getting children back into education, rebuilding their confidence and improving their skills through a number of initiatives.

We believe that education is a crucial element of children's integration into the community. We are committed to supporting children in local mainstream schools wherever possible. Some children cannot be placed into mainstream schools for any number of reasons, and we take their needs into account.

We have many years' experience of helping children and young people with their educational needs, and have introduced **educational support workers** to ensure that children have school places or alternative educational support.

We work with foster carers to provide them with the knowledge and understanding to have a long term impact on the educational experience and achievement of the children in their care. A programme of workshops covers:

1. Handling an appeal, e.g. about admission, exclusion and sanctions
2. Understanding the curriculum
3. Study skills and helping with homework
4. Transitions from key stages, between schools and GCSE options

Some schools are reluctant to accept children in care. Our educational support workers work hard to challenge these exclusions. We appreciate the schools and teachers that accept these children and we value our partnerships with them.

Health and Nutrition

St Christopher's Fellowship's Health Co-ordinator provides training for carers in nutrition, sex and relationships education, drug and alcohol abuse and promoting well-being.

Preparation for Independence

A **Plan for Independence** is drawn up in partnership with young people aged 16 and their carer. This identifies the particular strengths and needs of each young person and the resources that are available to achieve the young person's aims and objectives.

St Christopher's support includes guidance about developing life skills and the resources and emotional support to empower the young person.

Filial Therapy

Training in this research and evidence based play therapy empowers carers as therapeutic agents in their care of children (usually aged between two and twelve). Originally developed by clinical psychologists in the USA, filial therapy was brought to the UK by Dr Virginia Ryan at the University of York. St Christopher's uses an accredited filial therapist who trains and supports carers in their work with individual children, with the agreement of the placing local authority.

Other Therapeutic Services

We are able, in conjunction with the placing local authority, to commission services from a range of fully accredited specialists to provide the therapeutic approach that the child requires. This includes psychology, psychiatry, educational psychology and filial therapy.

Contact

We are committed to facilitating good contact arrangements where contact is in the interests of the child and part of the care plan. Contact can be arranged either in the carer's home, if this is safe for all household members and the best place for the child, or in our comfortable new offices in Mitcham and Southend.

We facilitate a contact agreement between the birth family, social worker and St Christopher's that sets out all the arrangements and expectations. We pride ourselves on welcoming parents in a non-judgmental environment.

Services for Carers

We are aware that there is a national shortage of good foster carers. We know too that the stress of fostering leads to a significant loss of carers each year. We believe that high quality accessible support is fundamentally important for the recruitment and retention of foster carers and for the children they help.

The personal quality of our support service is designed to ensure that our carers genuinely feel they are part of a team and are not alone in their commitment to the children. With the support and training we provide, we aim to maintain placement stability and keep unplanned disruption of placements to a minimum.

Our service ensures that a member of St Christopher's staff is available 24 hours a day to provide advice, support and guidance and to deal with emergency referrals from local authorities. In practice, our out-of-hours service is used sparingly by our carers: an indication that our regular contact and ongoing training enables carers to manage most issues that arise.

St Christopher's Training Programme

St Christopher's is committed to providing an extensive rolling programme of training for carers. The components include:

- Core knowledge** Subjects include: valuing diversity, child protection, safe caring, understanding and dealing with challenging behaviour, first aid for children.
- Skills development** Our programme is regularly updated and includes attachment theory, dealing with allegations, communicating with and listening to children, supporting attendance at school and engagement in education, anti-bullying, research and evidence based treatments for children and young people, and principles of filial and play therapy.
- Support group meetings** Our monthly meetings combine training and support. Carers are encouraged to share their concerns and also to hear speakers on a range of topics, including Every Child Matters and the outcomes framework, healthy lifestyles, life story work, preparing children for permanence, the role of the panel, research in fostering and adoption.
- NVQ** Foster carers are encouraged and supported to undertake the NVQ Caring for Children Award. Well-qualified external training providers are used to ensure that the training needs of foster carers and staff are met.

Our annual **Foster Carer Reviews** identify development plans in partnership with the carer. It is a condition of approval that our carers commit to continuing development and training. We endeavour to ensure that the training provided is timely, interesting and relevant to the current needs of the carer. This approach retains the interest and commitment of carers.

Allowances and Expenses

Foster carers do not foster for the money, but are dependent on some income to cover the costs of food, clothes and leisure activities for the children and to maintain their homes. We have a clear system for the payment of allowances and expenses, and our carers receive prompt payment.

Respite

We arrange respite where this is appropriate. It can be an important way of maintaining placements.

Social Events

Various social events are organised throughout the year in partnership with the carers. We hold a Christmas party, a summer outing and a variety of evening and daytime events for children and carers, including for example, workshops for young people in photography and fashion design.

Fostering Network

We encourage carers to join Fostering Network as individual members and pay for their membership. This gives carers access to the Network Helpline and advice on a range of matters, including taxation and finance.

IT Matters

St Christopher's is committed to developing the use of information technology for the fostering service. Information about fostering is now available on our website and we are working with our carers to develop services such as online learning and an online forum for carers, for the children of the family and for the fostered children. We would like all our carers to be able to use email as one of their options for contacting us and, where appropriate, for maintaining contact with children and young people after they have moved on, or on to independence.

Assessment and Recruitment of Carers

St Christopher's recruits carers from a broad spectrum of groups in society, irrespective of religion, ethnic or cultural background, economic position, disability, marital status or sexual orientation. We can therefore provide a wide choice of suitable carers.

In completing our assessment we use the standard and competency based BAAF assessment formats. However, as we are committed to research and evidence based practice, we are poised to introduce the use of the **attachment style interview** method (ASI) developed by Professor Antonia Bifulco and her team at Royal Holloway, University of London. A crucial aspect of the ASI is not just an assessment of the attachment style of the carer (which may be useful with regard to matching a child to a placement) but also of the likely support needs of a carer who is maintaining the placement of a child who has many needs.

The Stages of Assessment

Initial Enquiry

All enquirers are greeted in a positive, welcoming manner, even though many enquiries will be from people who may not go on to foster at this time. Those enquirers who wish to will receive our information pack, usually by return of post, and will be offered an early appointment with a social worker, either at the office or in their own home.

Home Visit

Our social workers visit the family in their own home to give more information about fostering and to ensure that the family and home have the potential to provide a high standard of care which will promote children's healthy emotional, physical and sexual development.

Prospective carers are encouraged to learn about the rewards of foster care. They are also advised to withdraw from the assessment process if they feel that the challenges of fostering are not right for them at that time.

Initial Training

Prospective carers take part in an initial training course of about 18 hours, which usually runs over three weeks on two consecutive weekend days and two evenings. The training course is run by very experienced trainers who have themselves been foster carers. It is based on Fostering Network and BAAF material.

Assessment

St Christopher's social workers gather information to complete the necessary assessment reports. The assessor will have 15-20 hours of direct contact with the family over a period of 3-4 months. Information about the carer(s) will be sought from other appropriate sources, such as an employer or landlord.

At least three referees will be interviewed. All necessary checks are undertaken on all household members over the age of 18. These are obtained from the Criminal Records Bureau, local authorities, the carer's current employer and other relevant agencies. The GP's medical examination of the carer is scrutinised by our medical advisor.

The Panel

The St Christopher's panel includes independent members who have expertise in the childcare field, representatives of the health, education and social work professions as well as a foster carer from another agency and a person who used to be in care. The chair is an independent member who has extensive experience of fostering.

The panel considers the application and recommends whether or not the carers are approved as foster carers. Prospective carers attend part of the panel meeting.

The Decision

The panel's recommendation is considered by the agency decision maker, a senior member of St Christopher's management, who will give final approval.

Annual Foster Care Reviews

In accordance with the National Minimum Standards, the performance and abilities of carers is reviewed every year. The supervising social worker meets the family to compile a report that covers the carer's undertaking of the fostering task during the year.

The report covers:

- ✦ the family's understanding of the needs of children and ability to meet them
- ✦ their ability to work with the care plan
- ✦ their ability to work with the birth family
- ✦ their sensitivity to cultural, religious and identity needs
- ✦ their ability to work as part of the child's care team
- ✦ the appropriate use of agency support
- ✦ the carer's development and any development and training needs
- ✦ any relevant issues for the carer's own children.

The views of the placing social workers and of children placed are sought.

The review is overseen by an independent children's services manager, and a mutually agreed development plan is drawn up.

St Christopher's Panel considers all the information and, if appropriate, confirms approval and adds any recommendations it may have.

Status and Constitution

St Christopher's Fellowship, first established in 1870, is both a registered charity and a housing association.

Elite Fostering, established in 2003, was acquired by St Christopher's in January 2006.

The Council of Trustees consists of co-opted members who offer their skills and experience from a wide range of backgrounds. The Council meets regularly, usually every six weeks.

The Annual General Meeting, where the Trustees' Annual Report is considered, provides a forum for discussion and for questions to be raised directly with the Council.

Inspection, Approval and Registration

Elite Fostering Limited, recently acquired by St Christopher's Fellowship and now trading as St Christopher's Fostering, was inspected, approved and registered by the National Care Standards Commission in 2003 and by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in 2004, 2005 and 2006. Detailed reports are available.

St Christopher's Fostering is registered with the Pan-London Consortium of London Boroughs.

Organisational Structure

Elite Fostering Limited was a private independent fostering agency until January 2006. It was founded by Barbara Walters-Ennis, an experienced foster carer who was also an experienced and qualified social worker.

In January 2006 Elite was acquired by St Christopher's Fellowship. The fostering service is therefore now a voluntary sector provider.

In December 2006 St Christopher's established a fostering partnership with Southend.

Jonathan Farrow, as chief executive of St Christopher's Fellowship, is the responsible individual.

Appendix One

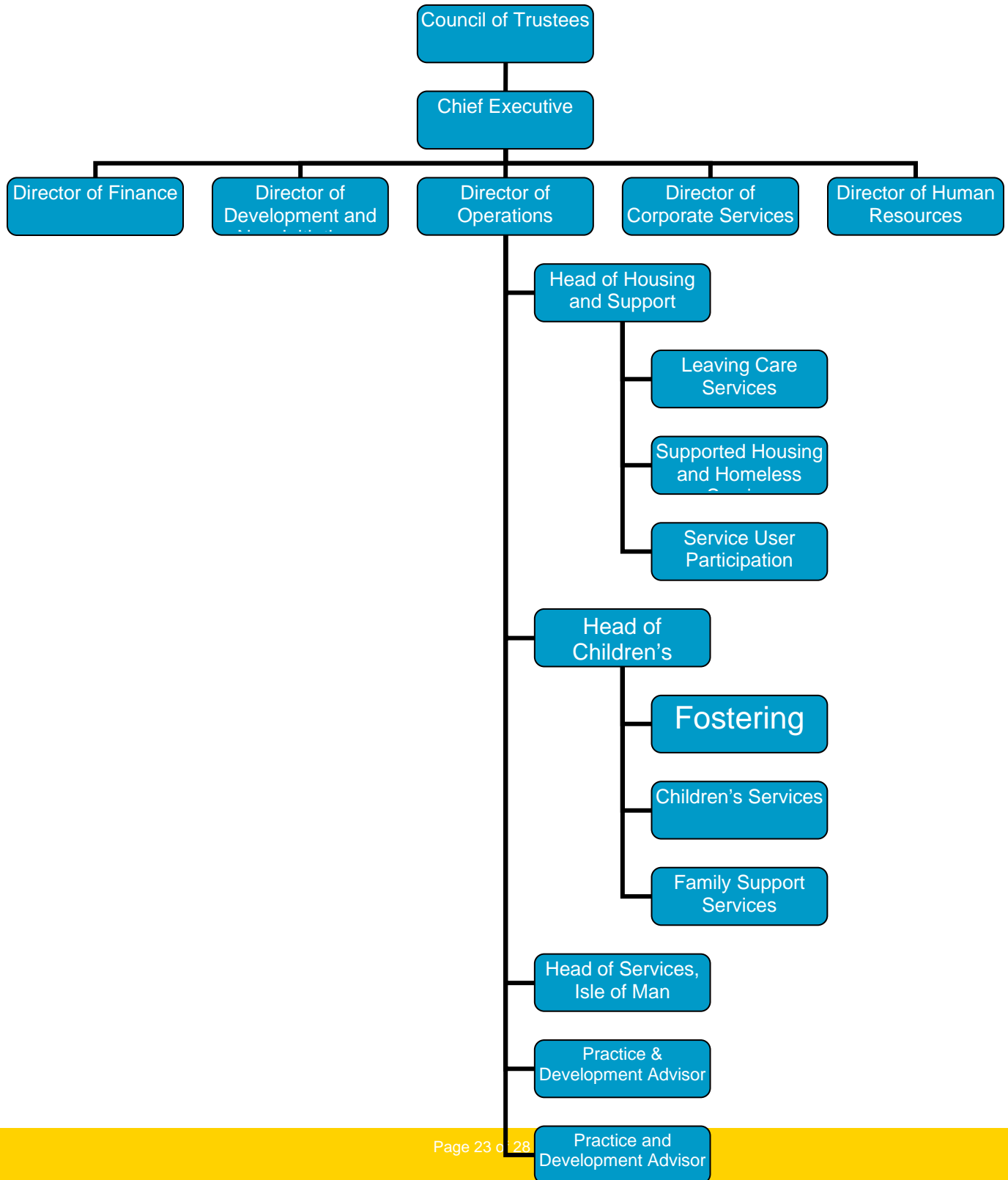
St Christopher's Fostering

Ron Giddens	Director of Operations
Gordon Parker	Head of Children's Services
Vacancy	Fostering Manager
Dawn Greenidge	Practice Manager
Sue Dove	Practice Manager
Patsy Terrelonge	Senior Practitioner
Phuong Truong	Social Worker
Matilda Ames-Lewis	Social Worker
Carol O'Connor	Senior Administrative Officer
Kayleigh Morrison	Administration Assistant
Karen Irving	Consultant
Dr James Ojo	Medical Adviser
Dr Alyson Hall	Consultant Child Psychiatrist
Geraldine Thomas MSc	Filial Therapist
Student Social Workers	2 placements per year

All social work staff hold recognised social work qualifications and are registered with the General Social Care Council. In addition to these qualifications some staff also hold post qualification awards or certificates (counselling, systemic family therapy, NNEB) and the managers hold certificates and Diplomas in Management Studies / NVQ level 5.

The managers and senior social workers have decades of social work experience working with children and families.

St Christopher's Fellowship – Outline Organisational Structure



Appendix Two

Placement fees

Basic placement fee	£742 per week (Reduced rates apply where St Christopher's is a preferred provider)
Parent and baby fee	£1,062 per week if the parent has full responsibility for the baby. Should the baby be accommodated under CA 1989 S20 or S31, the fee will be negotiated
Reservation fee	50% of fees payable
Specialist/enhanced placements	fees negotiable
Long-term placements	fees negotiable (if siblings)

Items included in placement fee

Fostering allowance to the carer(s)
 Food, including school meals
 Local travel costs
 Facilitation of contact by foster carer in their own home
 Placement reports
 Telephone calls to significant others (including professionals)
 Recreational activities
 Toiletries
 General hair care
 General school trips/equipment
 Weekly clothing allowance
 Attendance of meetings within a 20-mile radius of foster carer's home
 Birthday allowance
 Christmas allowance
 Pocket money
 Holidays arranged by carer after child has been in placement for six months
 Savings for child/young person

Items not included in placement fee

- Initial or emergency clothing allowance
- Extended school trips
- Specialist ophthalmic, dental or other specialist medical items/treatments
- Specialist counselling/therapy sessions
- Private education or home tuition
- Court reports
- Supervised contact outside of the carer's home
- Transport costs above a 20-mile radius of foster carer's home
- Specialist sports equipment
- Supervised contact by an agency worker

In order to provide a best value service, charges for additional services are negotiated on an individual needs basis. A more detailed list is available on request.

Frequency of Invoices

All invoices are payable every four weeks in advance, or weekly if a placement term is less than one month.

Payment terms and interest on late payments

Unless otherwise agreed, St Christopher's Fostering expects all invoices to be paid within 30 days. Late invoices may incur a penalty of 2% above the base rate.

Overpayments

Any overpayments made by a local authority due to a placement ending prematurely will be repaid within 10 working days from the date the placement ended.

Terminations

Both the local authority and St Christopher's are required to give 28 days notice with regard to a termination of placement.

Breakdown of placement

Should a placement break down prematurely, St Christopher's Fostering will make every effort to ensure that the local authority is given as much notice as possible. Provided the local authority is in agreement, the agency will also endeavour to identify an alternative placement.

Appendix Three

Number of Foster Carers

As at the 21st May 2007, there are currently 40 approved carers (2 currently on hold) with 34 placements.

Complaints / Allegations

Between April 2006 to March 2007 there were:

2 complaints

Neighbour was disturbed by a young person, an apology was offered and accepted

3 Allegations

A strategy meeting was held, one allegation was not substantiated

The second allegation was withdrawn and was not substantiated

The third allegation was from an anonymous caller in reference to the suitability of a foster carer, investigation had found that the agency had carried out all appropriate checks and the allegation was without merit.

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SS1 1EF

Tel: 01702 430120
Fax 01702 430690

Email: fostering@stchris.org.uk

We are a charity and housing association. We providing care, accommodation, education, training and support to children, young people and vulnerable adults.

We run children's homes, fostering services, supported housing and hostels, along with education, employment training and outreach services. For more information about us or to make a donation, please phone 0208 780 7800, email info@stchris.org.uk or visit www.stchris.org.uk.

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Registered Charity Number 207782

Housing Corporation Registration Number LH1832

Company Registered in England, Number 321509