



London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Fostering Service

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This statement of purpose is published in accordance with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. It complies with the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and takes account of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards issued in 2011 under section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The National Minimum Standards focus on delivering achievable outcomes for children.

This statement of purpose is reviewed and revised as required. Copies are made available on our website, to all fostering staff and to all foster carers, prospective foster carers, children placed with foster carers by the service, and their parents.

1. Introduction

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham provides a Fostering Service through its Fostering Team. The team is part of Children's Care and Support within Children's Services.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's Fostering Service is based at 2nd floor, Barking Town Hall, Town Hall Square, 1 Clockhouse Ave, Barking IG11 7LU. The Fostering Service provides a service which keeps the needs of children central to its activities and in line with legislation and government guidance. The service places high importance on the training and support of foster carers, regarding them as part of the professional team entrusted to provide and advocate for the physical, emotional, health and educational needs of children.

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a local authority in relation to fostering services and children in care.

The service works to ensure that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service. All prospective carers are recruited and supported on the basis of their ability to undertake the fostering task, and the needs of the service regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

2. The Management Structure

The Fostering Service is an integral part of Children Services. The overall responsibility for the management of the Fostering Service is with the Head of Service – Corporate Parenting & Permanence who is accountable to the Operational Director, Children's Care and Support. This incorporates the SGO and Adoption, Fostering, and the four Corporate Parenting Teams.

The day-to-day management of the work of the Fostering Service is undertaken by two Fostering Team Managers. The Team Managers alongside the Service Manager are responsible for ensuring that the Fostering Service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with the statement of purpose and the relevant regulation and legislation.

2.1 Staffing Structure (See Structure Chart)

The Fostering Team

The Fostering Team provides a full and comprehensive range of placement services. All the Social Work staff in the Fostering Team are qualified and the experience across the team is varied and extensive.

All social workers are registered with Social Work England and are subject to three yearly Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced disclosures. All managers are suitably qualified and meet the expectations of regulations, statutory guidance and National Minimum Standards in relation to experience and knowledge.

See Appendix A - Fostering Team Structure

3. Services Provided

Qualified Social Workers recruit assess and train applicants who wish to foster for Barking and Dagenham. This includes assessing short term, long term, respite and Connected Person carers. The approach is flexible in order to maximise the number of people eligible to foster, whilst at the same time ensuring that the statutory requirements and National Minimum Standards are met. Decisions to accept or refuse applicants are based on clear eligibility criteria and are fully discussed with the applicants in conjunction with the Marketing and Publicity, identify areas of need for the Children Looked After population of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The strategy aims to increase the number, stability and choice of family placements and to develop resources that are responsive to the needs of service users and their families.

The team aims to provide an efficient and user-friendly service and to build a good public image, which will attract more applicants to approach the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

3.1 Core Services

We operate a general Fostering Service, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups aged 0 to 18 years, in short-term, long term, parent and child placement and respite care placements with a number of foster carers continuing to support young people over the age of 18 under Staying Put arrangements.

In 2017 the service began to implement the Mockingbird model, which is supported by Fostering Network, and involves foster carers being part of a group who are described as satellite foster homes. They are supported by a central 'hub' home which provides resources and support to the satellite home. The hub home carer and satellite carers are supported by the fostering service which provides a Supervising Social Worker as a Liaison worker for each hub. There are now 5 hubs in LBBD with a membership of up to 10 fostering households per hub.

The support provided includes

- Planned and emergency respite care 24/7 with familiar carers and in familiar environments
- Monthly social events for families providing peer interaction and support for carers, children and young people,
- Unlimited access to social support and mentoring for satellite carers
- Help to navigate the system and access community resource.

The hub home can also provide a neutral environment for shared decision-making meetings, social worker visits, sibling and birth family visits, as well as critical support to social workers by problem solving, and so increasing safety, well-being, and permanency. A key feature of the Mockingbird Family Model is that it helps to take good care of the people who take care of children and young people.

The aims of the Mockingbird Family Model are to increase placement stability for children who are looked after, prioritise sibling connections, promote active child protection, support permanency and improve the support provided to foster carers so that the local authority can retain foster carers.

There are plans to set up further hubs as foster carers with the necessary requirements to become a Hub home carer are identified.

The Fostering Service is responsible for assessing, approving and monitoring all private fostering arrangements. This includes supporting both carers and children. However, any safeguarding issues that arise are referred to the Duty and Assessment Team.

3.2 Out of Hours Support

The Fostering Service provides an Out of Hours telephone support service to foster carers. This service is operated by staff from within the Fostering Team and operates from 5pm to 10 pm, Monday to Friday, and from 10 am - 10 pm at weekends and Bank Holidays. Outside of these hours, when the office is closed, foster carers can contact the Emergency Duty Team.

4. Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

4.1 Standards of Care

The Service has adopted the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) and operates in accordance with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011).

4.2 Child Placement and Consultation

Where a child cannot remain in their birth family, the Council will always endeavor to support their placement with another member of their extended family.

Where this is not possible, the first choice is usually the provision of substitute family care via the Fostering Service, on either a temporary/short-term or longer-term foster care basis. For

most children in care in the borough, a placement locally in foster care will be the most likely to meet their needs.

Before making any decision about the placement, the team will consider the child's wishes and feelings in accordance with their age and understanding.

4.3 Core Values

The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.

Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents, skills and aspirations leading to a successful adult life.

Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.

Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and considered.

Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.

The needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and considered

The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.

Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.

The vital importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.

Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.

It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities to provide the best care for children.

4.4 Meeting the Child's Needs in Foster Care

The Council will place children with foster carers who are approved under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

The service takes positive steps to ensure that the needs of children based on gender, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality are appropriately met.

In all placements the service is determined to achieve the best possible match between the carers and the child, considering factors of ethnicity, religion, language and culture.

The service also endeavors to maximize the children's life chances by providing them with positive experiences and opportunities to reach their full potential.

In order to maximize the opportunity for children to retain substantial and meaningful links with family, friends, schools and relevant others, they will be looked after whenever practicable within reasonable travelling distance of their family.

To promote contact with family and relevant others the Council will make available, where necessary, staff and resources that can facilitate or supervise contact between child/parent/previous care giver. Details of contact arrangements are entered on the Placement Agreement Form/Placement Information Record.

For all children in care, a written Care Plan or Pathway Plan will be established which will be reviewed with regularity.

In placing a child in foster care with another fostering service provider the Council expects the same principles to be adhered to.

5. Foster Carers

Foster Carers – In House

In March 2022 the service was responsible for 155 foster care households, who are approved, and care for children who stay on a short-term basis, are receiving a short break, or are matched long term with a foster family.

There are 5 Home hub carers and 47 Satellite carers belonging to one of the hubs. There are 71 children who are part of the Mockingbird hubs.

6. Children Placed with Barking & Dagenham Carers

The number of children placed in foster care fluctuates. In March 2022 there were 176 children placed within the Local Authority Fostering Service.

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7. Complaints and Representations

Children and their foster carers can make effective representations, including complaints, about any aspect of the Council's Fostering Service whether provided directly by the Council or by a contracted agency.

All foster carers and children in care using the Fostering Service are provided with written and verbal information about the Complaints Procedure. Attempts should be made to resolve complaints informally with the person concerned, but when this is not possible it is the responsibility of the Fostering Team Manager to respond.

Foster carers should raise any concerns they have with their Supervising Social Worker or the Team Manager in the first instance.

However, if they feel unable to speak to them, or believe that they have not dealt with their concern satisfactorily, they should contact the Social Care Complaint and Information Service.

8. Allegations against Carers

In all circumstances, allegations against carers will be investigated and responded to in accordance with the London Child Protection Procedures.

Barking and Dagenham informs all children and young people placed in foster care how they can access advocacy services through the Children's Rights Service?

9. Recruitment of Carers

Having too few foster carers leads to a lack of placement choice for children and increases the likelihood of children having to leave their local area.

When children have to move school and also cope with the difficulties of maintaining contact with family and friends, this is likely to contribute to placement instability, dissatisfaction amongst carers and most importantly, poorer outcomes for children and young people.

The Fostering Service has, therefore, developed a comprehensive recruitment strategy which is regularly reviewed to recruit new foster carers and retain the carers working with Barking & Dagenham Council.

The strategy is based on keeping the profile of fostering high within the community as a whole and within specific communities and cultural groups through promotional activities.

In addition, the Council must be satisfied that the placement of any child is the most suitable to ensure that the child's needs relating to racial, cultural and linguistic origin and background, religious observance and any disability are met as far as practicable. The recruitment and selection of foster carers will be undertaken accordingly.

To better identify the type of carers needed to meet local needs and circumstances the strategy also prescribes a systematic approach to profiling children in care and carers. Matching can then be improved and appropriate targeted campaigns can be delivered.

10. Approval of Foster Carers

1. Foster carers are approved in line with the legislative requirements and Fostering Services.
2. Carers are assessed in accordance with the CoramBAAF Form F format. The Council also incorporates the use of competencies drawn up by CoramBAAF and by the Children's Workforce Development Council.
3. In accordance with the Standards all relevant statutory checks are made, including enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service for all adults in the household.
4. The applicants' birth, marriage, divorce, naturalisation certificates and passports where applicable are seen.

5. Employers' references are obtained and at least two out of three personal referees are interviewed in person, and one via the telephone.
6. Each applicant receives clear information about the process of assessment along with details about fostering allowances.
7. The assessment and approval process involve all members of the applicant's household.
8. The assessment is carried out by an appropriately qualified social worker.
9. The assessment report is prepared by the social worker; it includes a clearly evidenced recommendation on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and the types of placement appropriate to the applicant(s).
10. Each applicant sees a copy of the non-confidential sections of the assessment report before a decision on approval is made and can make written comments if they wish to do so.
11. The Borough aims to complete assessments within three to six months of the application being received. The Fostering Panel aims to make its recommendation on the application within eight months of the receipt of the formal application.
12. All applications, including from connected persons carers, are considered by the Fostering Panel of Barking and Dagenham.
13. Prospective Carers are invited to attend the Panel which considers their application.
14. The recommendations of the Fostering Panel are then considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker will then write to the applicants to inform them of the Council's decision.
15. On approval the applicants sign a foster care agreement and receive a handbook and any necessary equipment.

11. Reviews of Foster Carers' Approval

In accordance with the regulations, a foster carer review is undertaken within 12 months of approval and this review will be considered by the Fostering Panel. A review is undertaken annually thereafter or more frequently if necessary, such as in the event of a change in circumstance, complaint, allegation or other concern.

The review will be brought to the Fostering Panel if there has been an allegation or there is a significant change in circumstance of the carers. In line with good practice every third review is presented to the panel.

12. The Fostering Panel

12.1 General

The Fostering Panel operates under the terms of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The Panel considers applications to foster presented by the Fostering Team.

The Panel also considers recommendations for the matching of children to long-term placements, and other significant matters relating to the assessment and review of foster carers as determined by the fostering service.

12.2 Membership

There is no fixed panel membership or maximum number of members or maximum tenure of office.

The membership is drawn from a Central List of persons with the appropriate qualifications and/or experience, including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience.

There is an Independent Chair, together with one or two Vice Chairs, whose role is to chair the Panel when the Chair is unavailable.

The Fostering Panel is quorate with 5 members, provided that the following are present:

- (i) Either the chair or one of the vice chairs (in the absence of the chair). If the meeting is conducted by a vice chair who is not independent, there must be at least one other member of the panel who is independent.
- (ii) One social worker with at least three years post qualifying experience.
- (iii) Three other members.

13. Foster Carer Support and Training

The Council recognises that carer support and retention is critical to the success of the Fostering Service.

Every carer has their own supervising social worker who provides support and supervision in accordance with the National Standards.

Foster Carers sign a Foster Care agreement and have a copy of the requirements of foster carers, supervising social workers, and the child's social worker.

Every child in placement is visited in accordance with statutory requirements.

Once approved and a placement is made, carers are linked to a more experienced carer for advice and support. (Buddy) or are placed as part of a Mockingbird Constellation

Foster carers may be provided with breaks from caring if appropriate which must meet the needs of placed children.

All foster carers are provided with funding for full membership of either The Fostering Network or Foster Talk, should they wish to join, following their initial approval and for their first year of fostering.

The Foster Care Association organises social events each year for foster carers.

The Fostering Service provides an out of hours telephone support service for all foster carers. Additional support is also available from the Emergency Duty Team when required.

Foster Carers are able to access the Council's Foster Carer Training Program. The trainings have been delivered in a Covid friendly fashion, and training has remained continues over the past two years throughout the pandemic. Face to face training is beginning to be offered alongside some remaining as virtual sessions which provides more flexibility for those foster carers finding it difficult to attend day-time classroom sessions. The foster carer must be able to evidence the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care, within the timescales specified in the Standards.

Carers begin their training before they are approved and attend a 3-day preparation group in which they are introduced to the fostering tasks and the work of the agency in relation to children in care and their families.

Some relevant training events set up by the council's Training & Development Team are open to carers.

14. Policies and Procedures

The Fostering Service operates in accordance with agreed policies and procedures and a Fostering Handbook, which are reviewed and updated as necessary.

All policies are uploaded to Tri X so as to allow transparency and accessibility to all.

The London Child Protection Procedures (<http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/procedures/>) is the overarching procedural framework governing the safeguarding of children across Children's Services.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is responsible for the co-ordination of all investigations that involve child protection allegations against foster carers. These processes are part of the formal requirements set down in the London Child Protection Procedures.

15. Corporate Parenting Group

The Corporate Parenting Group is responsible for scrutinising how the Council and its partners discharge their corporate parenting responsibilities. This group is chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services and meets bi-monthly. A number of foster carers and young people will attend and participate in these sessions, speaking openly and without influence.

16. Equalities & Diversity

In accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, an impact assessment will be undertaken on all new and revised policies in terms of equality, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, transgender status, marital status, religion, belief, or disability.