

Statement of Purpose

Fostering Service

London Borough of Redbridge

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1. Introduction

The London Borough of Redbridge Children and Families Service believe that the needs of children and young people are best met within their own birth families. However, we recognise that this is not always possible and for those children and young people where this is the case the Fostering Service provides alternative high quality care within a family setting.

The fostering service seeks to promote the principles and practice enshrined in the Children Act 1989, The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011, and [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#). The work of the Fostering Service is underpinned and guided by legislation, local policies and procedures.

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (Standard 16) and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Regulation 3(1)) state that the Fostering Service Provider must compile a written statement in relation to the Fostering Service, a "Statement of Purpose", which details the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the services and facilities provided.

This Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Standards and Regulations.

This Statement of Purpose includes:

- A statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service;
- A statement of the services and facilities provided by the fostering service ;
- Assessment and approval of foster carers; and
- Training and support for foster carers.

A copy of the Statement of Purpose will be made available upon request, to:

- Any person working for the purposes of the Fostering Service;
- Any foster carer or prospective foster carer of the Fostering Service;
- Any child/young person placed with a foster carer by the Fostering Service;
- The parent of any such child/young person;
- Any placing authority of any child placed in Redbridge foster care.

The Fostering Service must ensure that all times, the service is conducted in a manner which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose. This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed, updated and modified whenever necessary, but not less than annually.

If you have any comments or suggestions in relation to this document or the Fostering Service please contact:

Head of Fostering, Adoption and Placements

LB Redbridge Children and Families Service
Station Road Centre
Station Road
Barkingside

2. Principles and Vision

The Fostering Service operates in accordance with the principles and vision published in the http://www2.redbridge.gov.uk/cms/care_and_health/children_and_families/childrens_trust_partnership.aspx, which states:

"By working together we envisage a future for young people in Redbridge where they can fulfil their dreams and achieve their full potential. They will be aspiring, independent and confident, enjoying family, friends, learning and life. They will be proud of themselves and able to make informed life choices, while growing up in a safe and secure environment.

Young people will respect themselves and others, and be respected within their communities. They will have a voice and be listened to and heard, fully contributing to an inclusive, multi-cultural society.

Young people will develop a sense of responsibility and fairness and justice, becoming positive and informed members of their communities. They will continue to learn and develop throughout their lives, becoming healthy, creative, responsible and successful adults."

The Fostering Service supports and contributes to this vision by providing an effective, efficiently managed, high quality foster care service. The Fostering Service has a key role in supporting the Children and Families Service as the Corporate Parent for children who cannot live with their own families.

The Fostering Service is committed to achieving positive outcomes for looked after children and 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.
- The Fostering Service has a clear policy against corporal punishment, including no 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.
- The Fostering Service will actively engage children and young people in decisions affecting them and in the general operation and development of our services.
- Every child is valued for who they are.
- The Fostering Service 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 plan.
- Foster Carers, Supervising Social Workers and Children's Social Workers will work together in partnership with other agencies as appropriate to enable children to reach their full potential.
- The Fostering Service values the work foster carers do and the important contribution they make to the lives of the children and young people they look after.
- Foster Carers are part of the professional 'team around the looked after child'.

- The Fostering Service recognises that support, supervision and training of Foster Carers as active partners, is crucial in providing a safe, caring and transparent service to vulnerable children and young people.
- The Fostering Service is committed to the on-going professional development of carers and reviews the learning and development activities available on a regular basis.

3. Service Aims and Objectives

- To provide high quality foster care placements where each child will have stability, security and a warm, safe nurturing environment in which they can develop and thrive.
- To provide quality alternative family care, planned and delivered around the needs of looked after child that promotes their developmental, health and educational needs and gives them the same life chances as other children.
- The Fostering Service, including foster carers has high expectations that children in foster care will reach their full potential.
- To ensure that all children are safeguarded in foster care.
- To provide a Fostering Service which is managed by professionals with appropriate skills and experience and to do so ethically, effectively and efficiently.
- To provide a service responsive to the needs of children who require a family placement, recruiting sufficient foster carers to offer placement choice and create a culture where children and young people are encouraged to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing.
- To exceed the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and other standards set for example: [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#).
- To have in place a recruitment strategy to ensure Redbridge meets its Sufficiency Duty as set out in [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#). To recruit sufficient carers to match the number of children needing a placement.
- To provide wherever possible local placements, to promote continuity and maintain family networks.
- To ensure that prospective foster carers from all backgrounds have equality of access to the Fostering Service and are welcomed without prejudice, regardless of ethnic origin, faith, age, sexual identity, gender, disability, class 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 all foster carers, including family and friends, carers and children are aware of both the role and support function of Supervising Social Workers and to provide them with the information they need about foster care.
- To ensure that the preparation process prepares foster carers as well as possible for the care of children in care and that all foster carers are suitably prepared, trained and supported for the fostering task.
- To ensure that children are carefully matched to a prospective placement and that the arrangement of the placement and the introduction of the child are undertaken sensitively and in consideration of the best interests of both the child and foster carers.
- To provide a placement that meets the requirement of the child's care plan and wherever possible that reflects the child's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background.
- Wherever possible and in the best interests of each child, to place siblings together.
- Develop working partnerships that are inclusive of children, their families, Foster Carers, child care Social Workers, and colleagues in other partner agencies, including health, education and alternative providers as appropriate. A partnership embracing parents, children and carers, all working and planning in the best interest of the child who is fostered.
- To work in partnership with professionals, carers, parents and children to return children to their own family wherever possible.
- As a minimum standard, to promote a good relationship between parents and their children where a return home is not possible. We also promote and support children in contact with family members and significant others in line with their care plan and facilitate contact where this is appropriate.
- A child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account, and children will be encouraged to participate in decisions about their care.
- To ensure detailed Placement Plans are completed, including arrangements for Delegated Authority.
- To provide supervision, support and training for our foster carers, that enables them to meet individual children's needs and to ensure they look after the children in their care.
- To develop and maintain a high quality, comprehensive training programme for Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers
- To minimise the number of placements experienced by individual children and ensuring that placement stability procedures are followed.
- For children to move on from foster care in a planned and positive way and with regards to those leaving care, contribute towards a smooth, transitional service for young people moving into adulthood.

- Review and update policies, procedures and processes to ensure they meet statutory requirements and reflect best practice.
- Actively promote anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices with foster carers and service users. To ensure Foster Carers act as a responsible and reasonable parent in promoting the interests and welfare of children and young people in their care.
- To offer a transparent payments structure.
- That monitoring systems are in place to capture data regarding service activity on a regular basis and that this information is used to inform service planning, strategy and procedures.
- To provide advice and information to the Children and Families Service partner agencies, to users of the service and to the public.
- Adhere to the principles of Data Protection and Freedom of Information and to continue the sound practice in managing confidential information.

4. Service Structure

The Fostering Service comes under the Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption and Placements, part of the Children and Families Service in the LB Redbridge.

The Fostering Service is divided into two teams. Each of the teams currently has a Team Manager responsible for their work area. One Team provides ongoing support to foster carers and continuity, while the other Team is responsible for ongoing recruitment of Fostering Carers and their development.

5. Staff

The skills, knowledge and experience of the Fostering Service staff are the cornerstone to providing a safe and effective service to children and young people. All staff employed are appropriately trained, experienced and qualified. All staff receive monthly supervision and permanent staff are subject to Performance Management Reviews.

As well as the Head of Service, there is a Fostering Team Manager (Recruitment) and a Fostering Team Manager (Support), both of whom are qualified social workers. Within the Fostering Team there is currently one Senior Social Work Practitioner, and ten Supervising Social Workers. Working alongside the Team is a Fostering Recruitment and Development Officer, and a Placements Team, consisting of two Placement Officers.

6. Service Provision and Facilities

As an integral part of the Children and Families Service, the Fostering Service offers a comprehensive service to looked after children, to approved and prospective foster carers and family and friends foster carers and operational teams working with looked after children.

The Fostering Service offers a range of foster placements:

- **Task centred** foster placements for children of all ages needing emergency and short term placements;
- **Long-term** placements for children who cannot return to birth family when adoption is not the plan;
- **Parent and child** arrangements;
- **Flexi care** scheme for foster carers who need to attend meetings or training events;
- **Connected People** where young people are placed with friends and family;

In addition, Private Fostering is also managed within the Fostering Service. There is a separate [Statement of Purpose for Private Fostering](#) that details the services and support provided to children who are privately fostered, their families and private foster carers.

7. Placement Matching

This is the process where the needs of children are 'matched' to the skills, knowledge, experience and expertise of a particular foster carer(s). The Fostering Service works hard to provide placements to ensure that the needs of children are met.

The Placement Team is the first point of contact for enquiries from Social Workers requiring a foster care placement. The Placement Team will liaise closely with the Fostering Team Manager, Supervising Social Workers, Foster Carers and Social Workers to ensure the best possible match is made for all children.

Emergency foster carers are available to look after children who are received into care outside of office hours and their details are provided to the 4 borough Emergency Duty Service.

8. Delegated Authority (DA)

[The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013](#) sets out the principles of Delegated Authority (DA) in Foster Care placements .

A Placement Planning Meeting is held within 5 days of a placement being made and delegated authority will be discussed and managed according to the agreed [Delegated Authority for Children \(Non-Financial\)](#).

Children's social workers are responsible for completing this form in partnership with the Foster Carer, their Supervising Social Worker, the child according to their age and understanding, birth parents and any other relevant stakeholders in the placement.

The Supervising Social Worker will ensure that this written information is given to the Foster Carer along with the Placement Information Record.

9. Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

The Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention strategy which is supported by an annual operational plan. This is based upon the needs of looked after children and current data regarding placements, placement shortfall and future need.

The aim is to have a choice of placements available at the point of need for Redbridge children and young people.

Applications to become a foster carer are welcomed from people in Redbridge and the surrounding area, regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, and culture or employment status. Applicants must be 25 years of age or over to apply. It is a minimum requirement that all foster carers have a spare bedroom, unless they are only offering a placement to a baby or a child under two years old.

10. Fostering Enquiries

The Duty Social Worker for the Fostering Service responds to enquiries from the public about fostering. A booklet on fostering is sent to all enquirers for further information. This information is also available on [Redbridge.i](#).

Any person contacting the Fostering Service, expressing an interest in fostering will receive a welcoming response. The Service will not discriminate in terms of age, class background, religion, ethnic background or sexuality – however the Service will need to ensure that you are of good character and have the skills and qualities we are looking for to care for other people's children. The minimum age of 25 years is required in order to apply to foster. All enquirers will be able to have an initial discussion with the Duty Social Worker and it can be established if the applicant is able to potentially meet the current requirements of the Service. Basic information will be required at this stage (name, age, address). This information will be collated via a questionnaire which is completed by the Duty Social Worker over the phone. If the Duty Social Worker is satisfied the enquirer has the potential skills required, an initial home visit will be arranged. Enquirers are also advised about the next information session should they wish to attend before or after an initial visit, although this will not delay the visits and it is not a requirement to start the process.

11. Information Sessions

The Fostering Service holds bi-monthly recruitment information sessions which are run with the support of approved Foster Carers and staff from the Fostering Teams. Information sessions are also held in conjunction with the Adoption Team in two locations in Redbridge.

12. Initial Visit

The Fostering Service has a commitment to visit all suitable enquirers within five working days of their first enquiry.

The Initial Visit is an opportunity for the enquirer and all members of the household to talk openly about the potential fostering experience with a member of the Fostering Team. There will be an opportunity to answer any questions that the prospective Foster Carer has and for the Fostering Team staff member to ask questions about the family. The goal is to ensure that prospective Foster Carers are provided with a full understanding of the expectations of Foster Carers. Fostering is rewarding, but also challenging. Foster Carers are provided with the support to develop skills and stability which children and young people coming into foster care need from their Foster Carers.

If the initial visit supports the potential of the enquirer to become a Foster Carer and they wish to pursue the process, the next stage is to make a formal application. The aim is to provide feedback and the outcome of the Initial Visit within seven days. Once the application has been submitted, the assessment will commence.

The assessment of Foster Carers is managed using two stages.

13. Stage One

This includes undertaking all the necessary statutory checks, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and medicals checks and obtaining references from friends, family, education and employers etc. It will also include interviewing these people about the applicant's suitability.

14. Statutory Checks

National Minimum Standards 2011 and Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 require the Fostering Service to undertake statutory checks in Stage One.

These are:

- A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check on all people in the household who are over 18 and any people who will be supporting the foster carers, such as relatives and babysitters.
- Local Authority, employer and other agency checks (e.g. [NSPCC](#), Probation Service).
- Child Health and Education checks will be carried out on any school-age children in the household.
- Three personal referees (one of whom can be a family member) are requested who will provide written references for the applicants as part of the assessment process. These people will be interviewed by the assessing social worker.
- Interviews will be carried out on previous partners when they have been in a significant relationship.

15. Skills to Foster Training (STF)

All applicants must attend the [Skills to Foster](#) training course which is run by the Fostering Service. If an application to foster is made by a couple, both are required to attend the training. Preparation Training will be offered as part of Stage One. The Fostering Service provides regular preparation training, known as Skills to Foster Course (STF). In the event that the course cannot run within a timely manner (due to insufficient numbers), applicants will be offered the opportunity to attend a STF in another local borough, which is part of the same consortium as the LB Redbridge.

The course takes place over three days and is facilitated by two social workers with the support of approved Foster Carers. Those facilitating the course will provide written feedback on each applicant's participation in relation to the content of each session and this material will be used to hold a feedback interview with the applicant at the end of the training to discuss the suitability of them moving to Stage Two.

There will be an evaluation sheet available the end of each session and throughout the training seeking user feedback. The Service will use this to review and where necessary improve the training offered.

Stage One and Two can be run concurrently and where ever possible this will be the practice of the Redbridge Fostering Service unless there is good reason not to do so. Applicants will be advised and consulted with about the commencement of the Stage Two assessment.

16. Stage Two - Foster Carer Assessment

Stage Two is a narrative exploration of the prospective Foster Carer background, experiences, knowledge and skills which will help to assess future matching. This experience can be intrusive and lengthy, however it is an important and necessary part of the process. Stage Two will not start until the applicants have attended STF training and there is an agreement between the applicant and the Service about the suitability of the applicant to undergo a full foster carer assessment (i.e. Stage Two).

In cases where the stages have not run concurrently, once the information that is required in Stage One has been collected and providing that this is satisfactory and meets the requirements of the Service, applicants will be invited to apply to move into Stage Two. If for any reason this is not possible because of information gathered in Stage One, the Fostering Service will advise the applicants verbally and in writing within 10 days of receiving the information gathered which deemed them not suitable to progress to or when started continue with Stage Two.

The full assessment process is carried out in order to determine the applicant's suitability to meet the needs of any child/children or young person likely to be placed with them. The assessment is completed using the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) [Form F](#) over a series of visits to the applicant's home. Applicants are encouraged to undertake self-assessment during the process and are given regular feedback throughout the process. The assessment is carried out in line with National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011 and Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.

The Fostering Service aims to complete the assessment within five months from the date of starting the Stage Two assessment unless there are extenuating circumstances. The framework and timetable for undertaking the assessment will be drawn up as a written agreement between the assessing social worker and the applicants at the start of the assessment with a Panel date set at five months from the date of receiving the application form. NMS guidance allows a period of eight months for completion of an assessment to be presented at the Panel.

The assessment is quality assured by the Fostering Team Manager to ensure that it meets the requirements.

Once the assessment is completed, the applicants will have an opportunity to read and sign the assessment report and the report is then presented to the Redbridge Fostering and Adoption Panel.

17. Approval Stage

The Fostering and Adoption Panel is independent of the Fostering Service and is made up of a variety of professionals and independent members. The Fostering and Adoption Panel has an experienced Independent Chair ensuring all assessments have been undertaken correctly and in accordance with National Standards and Regulations.

Applicants are invited to the Fostering and Adoption Panel hearing their application, and although attendance is not compulsory, applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. The Panel will make their recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker whether to approve, defer for further information or not approve the application to foster. The applicant/s will be advised of the recommendation verbally on the day of the Panel. Unsuccessful applicants are informed of their right to make representations to the agency or apply for an Independent Review Mechanism Panel hearing within 28 days.

Prior to approval, a Supervising Social Worker will be allocated to the foster carer to support and supervise the carer in the fostering role once they are approved.

18. Family and Friends Carers

The temporary approval of a relative, friend or other connected person and the immediate placement of a child with a connected person under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations 2010 is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker, Team Manager and Head of Service. Only the Nominated Officer the Director of the Children and Families Service can agree to a 'temporary approval'.

When such a placement is made, a same day referral and notification of the placement is sent to the Fostering Service to enable the Service to start providing services to the temporary approved carers including making arrangements to undertake statutory checks, arrange payment and begin the full foster carer assessment including a named Supervising Social Worker to be allocated.

19. Fostering and Adoption Panel

Unlike most other Local Authorities Redbridge has only one panel that meets the statutory requirements of both the Fostering Services and the Adoption Agencies Regulations.

A Central List is held of Panel members including

Designation of the Fostering and Adoption Panel
Independent Chair
Vice Chair & Independent Panel Member
Medical Adviser & Panel Member
An Elected Member (Councilor)
Independent Panel Member
Independent Panel Member
Independent Panel Member

Social Worker (with at least 3 years' experience)
Social worker (with at least 3 years' experience)

The Panel is additionally supported by:

- Panel Adviser (Manager)
- Legal Adviser (Legal Services)
- Minute taker (Panel Administrator)

The Panel generally meets monthly (but more frequently where increased business dictates) to consider:

- Foster Care applications for approval;
- Long term Fostering decisions for children;
- The matching of children with long term foster carers;
- The initial annual review of Foster Carers, and if there is a change of circumstances or approval terms and when there has been a serious allegation or complaint; and
- Request to extend the assessment period for Family and Friends Foster Carer assessment; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.

Panel members and the Agency's Decision Maker (ADM) are supplied with copies of the reports to panel in the week preceding the Panel (no shorter than five working days prior to Panel).

The Fostering and Adoption Service ensures the effective administration and functioning of the Adoption and Fostering Panel, including the recruitment and annual appraisal of Panel members. All panel members hold valid DBS checks.

20. Supervision and Support for Foster Carers

The Fostering Service recognises that supervision, support and development opportunities for Foster Carers are vital. It is important that foster carers' work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the needs of looked after children in Redbridge.

Once a decision has been made by the ADM following the Fostering Panel recommendation, the Foster Carer will receive written details including any terms of their approval. They will meet with their Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and be given a welcome pack including two copies of the Foster Care Agreement to read and sign, retaining one copy for themselves.

All carers (including family and friends carers) have an allocated Supervision Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker visits foster carers regularly (National Minimum Standard No. 21 - Supervision and support of foster carers) at monthly intervals to monitor the standards of care provided and to assist the carer to play their part in the child's care plan. Supervising Social Worker are responsible for ensuring that the care offered to children in foster care meets the required standards.

The Supervising Social Worker visits and telephones the carer weekly whilst the child is in placement. All visits and support will be tailored to meet the needs of the Foster Carer and the child in placement to increase support and supervision if requested or deemed necessary by the Carers or the Supervising Social Worker.

When children are not in placement the Supervising Social Worker will continue visits at intervals of not more than every eight weeks unless it has been agreed by the Fostering Manager that visits can be less frequent, for example when there is a fixed and agreed break from fostering.

As part of the monitoring of the work of foster carers, there will be two unannounced visits by the Supervising Social Worker to the foster carers' home. If at any time the Fostering Service believe it is necessary to increase the number of unannounced visits, it has the power to do this but will advise the Foster Carers first.

A Duty Social Worker is available daily to offer support and advice to all Redbridge Foster Carers if their allocated Supervising Social Worker is away from the office and is not contactable.

The [Emergency Duty Team](#) is available to all foster carers when the Fostering Service is closed, at weekends, bank holidays and after office hours.

21. Independent Support for Foster Carers

Once approved and registered, the LB Redbridge will pay the annual subscription for Foster Carers who are automatically given individual membership of [The Fostering Network](#). This provides access to advice and support, including legal advice, independently of the service.

22. Foster Carer's Handbook

All Foster Carers, once approved, are provided with a copy of the Foster Carer's Handbook which provides comprehensive information on all aspects of fostering including information on allowances, training, procedures, etc. This is now online and can be found on <http://www.fosteringhandbook.com/redbridge/>

23. Children's Guide to Fostering

The Fostering Service has four guides for children who are fostered. These are available for children aged 4-10 years and 11 years and older but also separate guides for friends and family fostered children completed in the same style and ages structures. The child's social worker is responsible for giving this to the child and spending time with the child to talk this through and explain the contents according to the age and understanding of the child. The guides are made available in other languages and formats, for example Makaton if required. In addition the Authority has provided a Young Person's Guide to being looked after and a leaflet for professionals outlining LAC entitlements.

24. Foster Carer Training

The provision of post approval training is central in maintaining high standards of care by ensuring the personal and professional development of foster carers. Each Foster Carer has a Personal Development Plan (PDP) completed to identify their learning and development needs, building their skills in the fostering task.

The Fostering Service has a clear strategy that highlights safeguarding and first aid as an important area for foster carer training and this forms the compulsory core components for all approved foster carers. Safeguarding training must be completed on a yearly basis by every foster carer and first aid training must be completed every three years.

The annual Foster Carer's Training Programme has a comprehensive menu of training courses and Supervising Social Workers attend some of the Courses to support the learning and follow this through in their support work with Foster Carers.

There are minimum requirements expected of Foster Carers in relation to taking part in learning and development activities, including face-to-face training courses.

25. The Training Support and Development (TSD) Standards

As part of their induction all Foster Carers are expected to complete the [Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care](#) by producing a workbook in their first year following approval as Foster Carers and within 18 months for Family and Friends Foster Carers. The Supervising Social Worker is responsible for assisting Foster Carers to undertake this work and ensure that it is completed within timescale. The completion of the Standards are discussed in the Foster Carers first Annual Review.

26. Foster Carer Reviews

Foster Carers are approved for 12 month periods. Each year their work as a foster carer is reviewed and recommendations put forward to the Agency Decision Maker for continued approval, variation of the terms of approval or termination of approval. Reviews can take place at any time within the 12 month period, but cannot go beyond that period.

The Fostering Administrator will send out the consultation papers to foster carers, birth children, looked after children, the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Child's Social Worker, and any other significant person connected to the children in placement. The Supervising Social Worker is responsible for preparing a full set of paperwork (including their own report, ensuring health and safety, safe caring, DBS, checks etc. are all up to date). The Fostering Team Manager will review the Supervising Social Workers report prior to the Review taking place. Supervising Social Worker reports are shared with the Foster Carer prior to the review meeting. The Reviewing Officer (RO) will be given all paperwork and consultations returned to prepare for the review at least five working days before the review meeting is held.

The RO chairs the review meeting and prepares a separate report of the meeting with recommendations which is passed to the Agency Decision Maker (or panel then ADM) for a final Decision on approval for the following 12 months.

The majority of reviews take place in the Foster Carers home. For couples who foster it is the expectation that both parties will be present at the review meeting. The RO and the Supervising Social Worker are present alongside the foster carers to review the previous year and reflect upon practice. Reviews provide an opportunity to positively evaluate progress and practice over the previous year. This forms the essential evidence base to evaluate the care offered to looked

after children in the foster home; it also contributes to ensuring matching details are up to date and known.

All first Foster Carer Reviews are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration of continued approval within the first year of approval. Thereafter reviews are presented to Panel where there are changes in circumstances, complaints or allegations.

Concerns regarding a foster carers progress or change in circumstances can lead to a review being called at any time. The carer or the Fostering Service can request a review at any time. All foster carers are required to have DBS and other statutory checks and medical reports updated every three years.

27. Foster Carer's Allowances

The Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that foster carers are paid the appropriate allowances. Details of the current allowances for foster carers are provided to all foster carers and listed in the Foster Carers' Handbook. These are reviewed annually in accordance with NMS and Foster Carers are consulted if changes are proposed.

28. Managing Allegations

The Fostering Service:-

- Recognises the crucial role that foster carers play in looking after its most vulnerable children;
- Acknowledges that looked after children may exhibit behaviour that can be damaging both to themselves and those around them;
- Acknowledges that dealing with child protection concerns, serious incidents and complaints is a stressful and difficult time for foster carers and their families;
- Will ensure that enquiries are progressed in a way that is fair and open to the carer and their family as well as to the child;
- Will ensure that decisions and actions are taken without delay and in line with legislative and Local Authority timescales;
- Ensure that foster carers have immediate access to information and advice from an independent support if there is an allegation against them or the Fostering Service has informed them that they have a serious concern about their practice or standards of care. (NMS Standard 22 – Handling allegations and suspicions of harm);
- Ensure that foster carers are prepared through pre-approval training and assessment of the possibility that allegations could be made against them.

All allegations of abuse made by children against foster carers, or members of the foster carers' family, are thoroughly investigated. All allegations of harm made against foster carers or

members of their household are reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The [London Child Protection Procedures](#) for managing allegations are followed. The investigation is evidenced based and takes a balanced view of the allegation. Unfounded allegations are sometimes made. A decision as to how to proceed will be made which will be in the best interests of the child.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a safeguarding allegation, this is dealt with as a safeguarding enquiry under [Section 47, The Children Act, 1989](#), and is investigated under safeguarding procedures.

The Fostering Manager is responsible for notifying OFSTED when there is an allegation which requires a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Foster Carers have access to independent support throughout the process of investigation, where there are allegations.

29.

29. Comments, Complaints and Compliments

The Fostering Service believes that service users and their families, and foster carers, have the right to express their views for example in the form of compliments, 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.

At the heart of the complaints procedure is the clear understanding that the protection, welfare and interests of the child or young person must come first.

There is a written procedure given to all Foster Carers as part of the Foster Carers Handbook on the complaints procedure. At each Foster Care Review, Foster Carers will be asked by the RO if they know how to make a complaint and given a copy of an up to date complaints leaflet if required. Under development is a 'Welcome Pack' for looked after children which will include the Children's Charter, which includes information on how to make a complaint, the Children's Guide to Fostering and lots of other information about how to get independent advice and support should the need arise.

Some looked after children may want their Foster Carer to make the complaint on their behalf or engage with the [Children's Rights Advocacy Service](#). Foster Carers may also make a complaint on behalf of a younger child or a child with disabilities. These complaints would be dealt with under the Children Act 1989 and the [Children's Services Complaints Procedure](#).

Complaints made by Foster Carers with regards to the Fostering Service will be dealt with under the [Corporate Complaints Procedure](#). Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against a Foster Carer will be dealt with on a problem-solving basis.

The Corporate or [Children's Services Complaints Procedure](#) will be enacted if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.

30. Registration and Inspection

The Fostering Service is registered with [Ofsted](#), the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, an independent body that reports directly to Parliament. Ofsted is responsible for having an overview of the Fostering Service. They undertake regular inspections of the Fostering Service and during the inspection seek confidential feedback from service users, carers, and placing social workers. Reports are published on the Ofsted [website](#).

Ofsted are alerted to any significant incidents in the Fostering Service such as child protection investigations or major allegations against Foster Carers.

Enquiries should be addressed to:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
MANCHESTER
M2 7LA

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 1231 (about children services)

Tel: 0300 123 4666 (complaints about agencies)

Tel: 0161 618 8524 (minicom/textphone enquiries)

Website: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

31. Key Contact Details

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Telephone: 020 8708 7535 or 020 8708 7897

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Placements Manager

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Duty Supervising Social Worker

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