

The London Borough of Barnet Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

1. Principles

- 1.1 Barnet's fostering policy, drawn up in the context of the Human Rights Act, states "*Barnet believes that every child or young person has a right to family life.*" We will strive, therefore, to maintain children and young people within their own families where this is possible, consistent with their safety and well-being.
- 1.2 Where an assessment determines that the threshold of care criteria has been met, we will make strenuous efforts to identify potential carers within the wider network of the child/young person, including consideration of family members, friends and other connected persons. Where continuing care within this network is not possible, we will make every effort to identify suitable alternative carers. It is our belief that no child under the age of twelve should be placed other than in a foster placement unless there are sound assessed reasons for another type of placement.
- 1.3 When a child/young person lives in a fostering household, he/she deserves to be treated by their carers 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.
- 1.4 The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care. The central importance of the child's relations with their foster carer(s) is acknowledged, as well as the significance to them of contact and maintaining relationships with birth family members and important friends.
- 1.5 Carers are approved, supervised and supported against an agreed set of standards which are in line with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Department of Education's National Minimum Standards for fostering services.

2 Aims and objectives

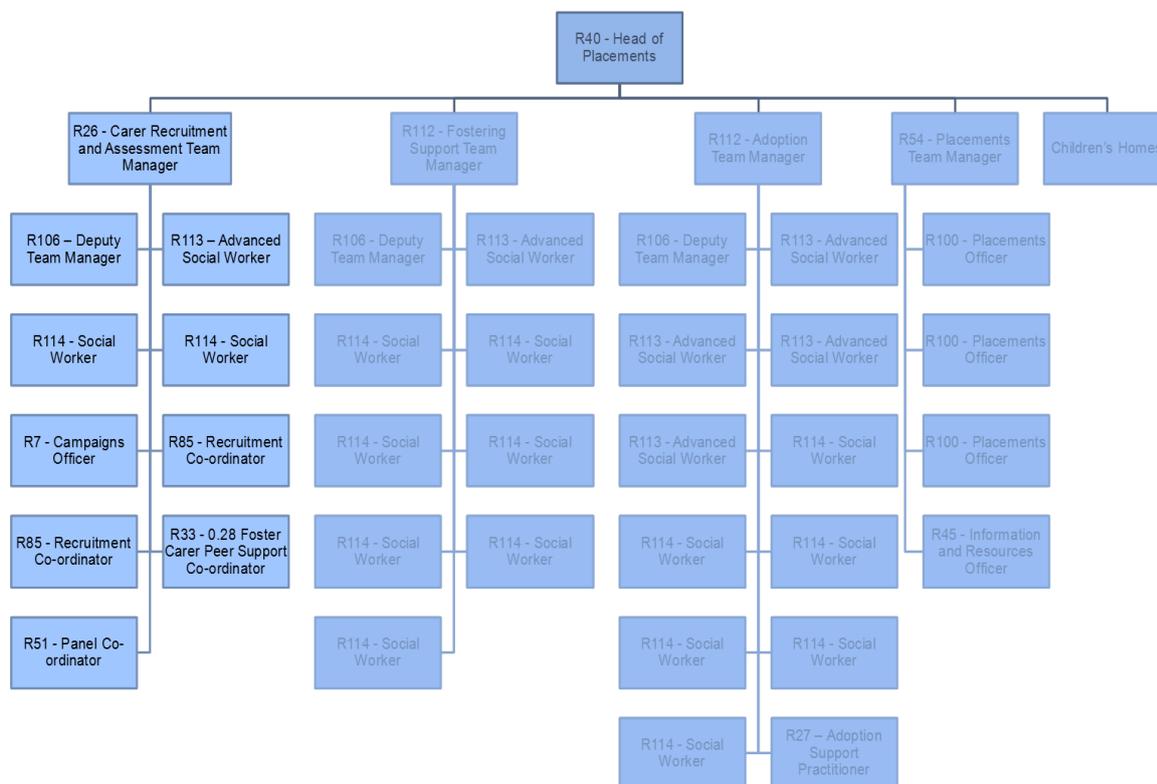
- 2.1 As part of the services it provides to children and families, Barnet has established a Fostering Service. The service aims to provide foster families for children who cannot, either temporarily or permanently, be cared for within their own family of origin, by relatives within their extended family or by other connected persons, or where a short-term break is necessary in order to help families manage in difficult situations.
- 2.2 In providing foster placements for children and young people, Barnet aims to meet as far as possible their full identity needs, in terms of race, religion, language and culture, alongside their needs in respect of education, health and disability.

- 2.3 To facilitate this we aim to recruit a wide range of families from all sections of the community, who are able to meet a variety of needs.
- 2.4 All potential carers will be carefully screened, assessed, trained and supported to ensure that they are able to meet the required standards to care for children and young people in placement.
- 2.5 Where approved carers are unable to meet all the assessed needs of a child/young person, Barnet will seek to identify other means of support for the carer and the child/young person, to enhance the care offered in the placement.
- 2.6 Barnet is committed to improving the life chances of young people placed within the fostering service, and makes available a variety of support mechanisms to help ensure stability of placements.
- 2.7 Foster carers and supervising social workers in the Fostering Service aim to work in partnership with social workers, social care professionals and other agencies, to achieve positive outcomes for the children and young people who are In Care in Barnet.
- 2.8 The Barnet Foster Carers' Charter outlines the expectations on all parties for working in close partnership to provide the best possible service to Barnet's children. It includes the undertakings by the Service to support Barnet's foster carers, to involve them in decision-making both about the children in their care and about the operation of the Fostering Service.
- 2.9 We work in close partnership with the north London boroughs of Enfield, Haringey, Camden, Islington and Hackney, including sharing placements (with the foster carers' agreement), to maximise usage of our foster carers.

3. Management structure

- 3.1 The Fostering Service is in the Family Services Group within Barnet Children's Service.
- 3.2 The Fostering Service is managed by a Head of Service, who is answerable to the Assistant Director of Social Care. The day to day management of the service is the responsibility of Team Managers who are answerable to the Head of Service.

3.3 Structure Chart



3.4 Three teams make up the Fostering Service:

- **The Carer Recruitment and Assessment Team** is responsible for recruiting, training and assessing and supporting applicants who wish to become foster carers, connected person's carers. The team also recruits and supports adopters during the Stage one enquiry process and assesses Special Guardianship applicants.
- **The Fostering Support and Development Team** is responsible for offering on-going supervision and support for foster carers (includes task centred, long term and connected person's carers). They encourage and support the development of foster carers throughout their fostering career.
- **The Adoption and Permanence Team** assesses adoption applicants and provides on-going support to carers who become Special Guardians for the children in their care. In addition this team also has responsibility for the matching of children with adopters and offering support according to the adoption support plan or special guardianship support plan. This team also identifies potential carers for children up to the age of 12 who require long term fostering placements and progress these to matching at the Adoption and Permanency Panel.
- The Placements Team are responsible for finding placements for Looked After Children internally and externally. They also monitor service providers, placements and ensure standards and expectations are maintained in external placements.

- 3.5 **The Children’s Workforce Development Team** takes responsibility for the provision of training for approved foster carers. Foster carers also are given access to relevant courses provided for staff.
- 3.6 **An Independent Reviewing Officer** (separately managed within the Safeguarding Section of the Children’s Service) chairs all annual reviews of foster carers.
- 3.7 The **Corporate Parenting Team** is a multi-disciplinary team that includes health, education, children’s participation and project personnel. The team supports and promotes the interests and needs of Barnet’s children in care, with a holistic approach and a variety of special initiatives.
- 3.8 **The Fostering Panel**, composed of members who can bring a broad range of perspectives to informing decisions made about the approval of fostering households, routinely hears all applications to foster and reviews currently approved foster carers after their first year of fostering and three-yearly thereafter. They also consider recommendations concerning significant changes of approval, including terminations.
- 3.9 **The Decision Maker for foster carers’ approvals** is Head of Service, Placements.

4 Service provision

4.1 Recruitment of carers

- 4.1.1 The service recruits, trains, assesses and supports people who wish to become foster carers, and in doing so adheres to Fostering Regulations 2011 and 2013 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering.
- 4.1.2 There are five types of fostering that Barnet carers provide:
- Task-centred fostering, which is having children placed with foster carers for temporary periods, whilst their longer term residency arrangements are settled. Task-centred foster carers also provide respite placements for Children in Need and to support the placements of other foster carers.
 - Permanent fostering, which is having children placed with the intention they will be part of their foster carers’ household until they are mature enough to live independently.
 - Connected Person / kinship foster caring, which is having children placed for fostering by someone who has a pre-existing connection to them, usually being one of their relatives.
 - Parent and child fostering, which is having a parent and their baby placed in the fostering household, either for a 12-week assessment of the parent’s ability to live independently with their child, or for a longer-term support arrangement.
- 4.1.3 Applicants for fostering approval are required to take part in the Skills to Foster preparation/training group prior to commencing their fostering assessment. Their full assessment is carried out either by a social worker in the Fostering Service or by an independent social worker.
- 4.1.4 Assessments of non-kinship carers are carried out according to the format provided by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Form F) and kinship carers’ assessments use a locally-agreed format. All relevant checks are carried out and

references taken up. A report is prepared outlining the competence of the prospective carers to carry out the tasks of fostering.

- 4.1.5 Barnet's approved foster carers are strongly embedded in the recruitment process, through our Peer Support Scheme. They deliver Barnet's Information Sessions, co-run Skills to Foster, provide one-to-one meetings with enquirers and applicants to help them consider specific issues, co-run an Applicants and New Carers' Support Group and act as Peer Buddies to new carers.
- 4.1.6 In addition to our recruitment publicity to the general public, Barnet runs targeted recruitment events for specific communities of interest. Currently these include the Orthodox Jewish community, the Muslim community and the Gay, Lesbian and Transgender community.
- 4.1.7 We aim to avoid delay in the assessment and approval of carers and timescales are monitored. For non-kinship carers, the National Minimum Standards are for assessments to be completed within eight months of the enquirer submitting their application.
- 4.1.8 In the case of Connected Persons wishing to foster a child in care to Barnet, a viability assessment is undertaken and if the child subsequently is placed with the connected person, a fuller assessment is undertaken which is similar to that undertaken for members of the public who are applying to foster. Connected persons are foster carers immediately after the placement of a child with them, under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. Their post-placement assessment works to a timescale of 16 weeks.
- 4.1.9 The service has a Fostering Panel. Assessment reports on prospective carers and kinship carers are presented to the Panel, which makes recommendations about the suitability of prospective carers to the agency decision-maker (currently the Assistant Director, Social Care). Prospective carers and kinship carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel.

4.2 Arranging placements

- 4.2.4 Requests for placements of children and young people are initially referred to the Placements Team.
- 4.2.5 The task of identifying a suitable foster family is shared between the duty social worker in the Fostering Service and a duty officer within the Placements Team.

- 4.2.6 As much information as possible is gathered to ensure that in finding a suitable family, the child/young person's needs are taken into account. Children are placed locally whenever possible, to avoid disrupting a child's education and for contact arrangements with birth family members. We try to make placements that reflect the key components of a child's identity; however children will be placed within families which best meet their overall needs, and any identified limitations in matching the cultural and religious needs will be supported through additional services or the involvement of our wider network of carers.
- 4.2.7 Children who are highly likely to be adopted can be placed with foster carers who have been approved, through the Adoption Team, as suitable for 'fostering for adoption.'
- 4.2.8 Information about the child's needs and views is shared fully with the prospective foster carer. Once a proposed placement is identified, the child/children are provided with the foster carer's profile and are involved in introductions prior to finalising placements, whenever this is practicable.
- 4.2.9 The child's Placement Plan is drawn up and reviewed with full involvement of the child and the foster carer. Within this Placement Plan, which aspects of the child's day-to-day life require the involvement of the child's social worker are discussed. Subject to stated restrictions, foster carers are given delegated authority for all routine aspects of day-to-day decision-making for the child/ren in their care.
- 4.2.10 Foster carers are expected to keep daily logs and monthly summaries of the experiences of children in their care. There are clear expectations about which issues and events require immediate reporting to either the child's social worker or the foster carer's supervisory worker. There also are clear expectations about how the Fostering Service and foster carers protect individuals' privacy and personal data.
- 4.2.11 Both the child and their foster carer are central contributors to the statutory reviews of the child's Care Plan. There is a formal Child in Care reviewing process. Reviews take place at specified intervals as well as in response to possible changes in the child's Care Plan or any change in their placement.
- 4.2.12 If a child placed with a task-centred foster carer later needs to be provided with permanency, their foster carer will always be considered a potential permanent carer for that child if that is their wish. A foster carer who has had a child in their care for 12 months or more is legally entitled to apply to adopt that child. If not already approved as an adopter, the task-centred carer would need to be assessed and approved for this.
- 4.2.13 The Adoption Team holds responsibility for planning permanent placements for children under the age of 12, in terms of adoption or permanent fostering. The process includes Permanency Planning Meetings to complete a profile of the child and the hierarchy of her/his needs, advertising and/or approaching external agencies. The Adoption and Permanency Panel makes recommendations about intended matches.

4.3 Training for foster carers

- 4.3.1 A foster carer's handbook is provided to all new carers, which includes essential information and policies, procedures and guidance for foster carers.
- 4.3.2 Barnet Children's Service has a Children's Workforce Development Team that commissions training courses for staff, including foster carers. Additionally, staff in the Service lead some training and training is available through reciprocal arrangements with five other London Boroughs, through the North London Fostering Consortium.
- 4.3.3 Foster carers are issued with a comprehensive programme of training, designed to enhance their individual skills and abilities as carers and give them opportunities for further development. This includes induction training and core courses to be completed by all carers, as well as a range of additional training options.
- 4.3.4 Foster carers can train alongside social workers and staff from other local agencies, as well as having training especially provided for foster carers. They can train through relevant courses available elsewhere, through courses on the Internet, and through 'creative learning' options, such as watching relevant programmes or reading relevant articles/books, and reflecting on them.
- 4.3.5 All carers are expected to complete their Foster Care Standards Portfolio in their first year of fostering; training and support is offered to achieve this.
- 4.3.6 Where, for reasons of distance or other reasons, carers have difficulty attending Barnet's internal training, efforts are made to identify alternative learning options.
- 4.3.7 Carers who are connected persons are also encouraged to attend training; it is recognised that such carers may also benefit from additional development opportunities such as workshops and discussion groups.

4.4 Support for foster carers and their families

- 4.4.1 Each foster carer has a supervising worker who provides on-going support and supervision. Visits to new carers generally are undertaken four-weekly, and additionally in response to needs. For experienced carers, supervisory visits are undertaken at regular intervals, reflecting the skills, experience of the foster carer and the needs of any children in their care. At least one unannounced visit will be carried out once a year, in accordance with regulations and guidance. The supervising worker will maintain regular contact by telephone and correspondence, and will make additional visits as required.

The supervising worker will help to identify relevant training for the carer, and offer advice and access to other means of support. S/he will also monitor the health and safety standards within the home and the quality of care provided. The level of support offered to connected persons who are caring for a child in care to Barnet is comparable to that received by all other carers.

- 4.4.3 The supervising worker will work alongside the foster carers to ensure that the experience of the carers' children of being in a fostering household is not detrimental to their well-being.

- 4.4.4 Outside usual office hours support can be accessed by foster carers through the Emergency Duty Team, which covers Barnet and Harrow. Additionally, a Barnet team manager or Head of Service is always on call to offer consultation and advice to foster carers.
- 4.4.5 Regular support groups take place, scheduled both in the daytime and evenings. These support groups enable a regular dialogue with the service as well as discussions with other carers.
- 4.4.6 When foster carers need practical help to enable a placement to be made or to be sustained, the Fostering Support and Development Team makes and/or enables arrangements for the additional support required.
- 4.4.7 Foster carers are paid a maintenance allowance and a skills fee in relation to each child placed. Full details of payments policies are made available to carers and payments are made weekly.
- 4.4.8 Barnet has a Skills Level Structure. New carers generally are initially approved as Level 1 carers but may progress to Level 2 and Level 3 by meeting specific criteria related to their demonstrated skills, commitment to on-going development and contribution to the development of other carers.
- 4.4.9 Barnet Homes (social housing) awards Priority Banding 1 to all approved foster carers who need re-housing in order to be able to foster the age/number of children they are approved to have placed with them.
- 4.4.10 Part of the strategy to increase local foster placements in Barnet is to expand the accommodation to the homes of qualifying foster households. The Barnet Fostering Loft and Conversion Policy and fund has been made available to Foster Carers to support this strategy.

4.5 Additional support to carers and to children in placement

- 4.5.1 The Virtual School for children in care offers education support for all children in care, in order to ensure that all children in care have a good school place and the necessary support to meet their educational needs. The Virtual School also supports care leavers' post-school education, as appropriate. An Education Panel, which is held fortnightly, provides advice, guidance and funding to develop appropriate education progression plans, for children in care and care leavers.
- 4.5.2 Within the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), carers and children and young people in placement are offered speedy access to assessment and a variety of therapeutic services, from their Children in Care service.
- 4.5.3 Initial health assessments on children and young people as they become Looked After are carried out by designated GPs and overseen by the Designated Doctor for Children in Care. Subsequent health assessments are undertaken by either one of the two Children in Care nurses, a Specialist nurse practitioner or school nurse, dependent on who is most familiar to the child. The Children in Care Nurses will follow up any issues or special health needs; they are based in the Corporate Parenting Team.

- 4.5.4 The contact service of LB Barnet provides supervisors and venues for contact sessions that need to be held outside of the child's foster home. This is located in a dedicated contact centre in New Southgate.
- 4.5.5 Barnet foster carers automatically are members of the Fostering Network, which provides them with access to independent information, consultation, legal advice, indemnity insurance against liability claims, etc.
- 4.5.6 Barnet Foster Care Association (BaFCA) can provide peer support for all LB Barnet foster carers.
- 4.5.7 School-aged children living in fostering households are invited to participate in the 'Role Model Army' or the 'Junior Role Model Army': facilitated groups for children in care.
- 4.5.8 On a yearly basis there are several gatherings for children in Barnet's care, to enable them to experience the commonality of being children in care, to celebrate their achievements, and to give them focussed opportunities to communicate their views about what Barnet provides.
- 4.5.9 Support groups and coffee mornings for foster carers each take place monthly. Additionally, the Service arranges for forums and events for foster carers and for the children of fostering families.
- 4.5.10 Children who do not have contact with birth family members are encouraged to take up the opportunity of having an Independent Visitor, accessed via the child's social worker.
- 4.5.11 Children have access to an independent Children's Rights Service run by Barnardo's. Their telephone number is 0800 027 3348. This service can be particularly helpful in supporting children to provide their views, wishes and feelings to statutory reviews.

4.6 Reviews of foster carers

- 4.6.1 In line with Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 each fostering household is reviewed at least once a year. The review is carried out by an Independent Reviewing Officer located in the Safeguarding Division.

The annual review recommends whether the carer's approval should continue or whether the terms of their approval should be changed. In certain circumstances the review might recommend the termination of the approval of the carers.

The first annual review of foster carers is presented to the Fostering Panel, as is the review every third year thereafter. Also presented is any review where a change in the terms of approval or termination of approval is recommended. The carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel.

- 4.6.1 A review must also take place in the event of the following:
- A serious complaint or allegation is made about the foster carer
 - A change in the marital or partnership status of the foster carers
 - A significant break from fostering by the foster carer
 - At the request of the foster carer

4.7 Further information

- 4.7.1 More detailed information about the work of each part of the Fostering Service can be obtained from the Fostering Service (LB Barnet Children's Service, Building 4, North London Business Park, Oakleigh Road South, London N11 1NP).

5 Staffing

- 5.1 The Fostering Service employs thirteen full time equivalent Social Workers across the fostering teams. The Adoption and Permanence service employs Ten social workers and three Family Support Practitioners. A Head of Service manages the Fostering, Adoption, Placements and Residential Services and each team has a Team Manager and Deputy Team Manager.
- 5.2 In recruiting staff we adhere to the requirements of National Minimum Standards for Fostering in monitoring suitability, status and qualification.

6 The current position of the service

- 6.1 At time of writing Barnet had 105 approved foster carers. This number changes regularly as carers retire, resign, move on, or as new carers are approved. This number is updated monthly and incorporated into Barnet's management information.
- 6.2 Because of a shortfall in our own resources, Barnet also needs to commission carers through external providers.

7 Complaints and allegations

- 7.1 The service has a complaints procedure, details of which are given to all users of the service.
- 7.2 The Children's Service Complaints Officer is based at North London Business Park [NLBP] and is contactable on 0208 359 7008.
- 7.3 The fostering service maintains records of complaints to the service. Complaints received are logged and statistics produced quarterly. Most complaints are dealt with informally to the satisfaction of the complainant, so complaints rarely proceed to the formal stage.
- 7.4 Foster carers who are unhappy with decisions made about their registration can take Barnet's decisions for review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).
- 7.5 All allegations of harm made against foster carers or members of their household are reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), who is in the Safeguarding Service of LB Barnet. Foster carers who are subject to investigation are provided with independent support.

Procedures also are in place for the consideration of concerns raised of standard of care issues. Clear conclusions are made as to the evidence concerning the issue raised and any corrective action needed.

- 7.6 Under the Council's Whistle-Blowing Policy, all staff, volunteers, foster carers and panel members have a clear duty to report to an appropriate authority any circumstances within the fostering service which they consider likely to significantly harm the safety, rights or welfare of any child placed by the service.
- 7.7 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. OFSTED are alerted to any significant incidents in the Fostering Service such as child protection investigations or major allegations against carers. They can be contacted at Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester, M2 7LA, telephone 08456 404040.

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