

Family Services

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1. Introduction

Why does Barnet provide a Statement of Purpose?

The Statement of Purpose (“the Statement”) has been written in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and relevant statutory provisions. It will detail what services are provided, the governing principals and who manages and provides the services.

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This statement is intended to provide a clear description of the London Borough of Barnet’s Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is intended to provide information for:

- Foster carers and prospective foster carers (includes foster carers’ own children)
- Children and young people placed with Barnet Council foster carers
- Local authorities which place, have placed, or are considering placing children with Barnet Council foster carers.
- Children Services staff who are involved in providing services to Looked After Children.
- The Public

Barnet Fostering Service works in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989. The Children and Families Act 2014
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and Wales)

Our vision is for all the Looked After Children of Barnet to be safe and healthy in a caring environment where every child and young person can have access to services that recognises and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality enabling them to realise their potential and enhance their life opportunities.

Our Fostering Service recognises a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their birth family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible. The priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends known as connected carers.

2. Aims of the Fostering Service

Barnet's Fostering Service aims to provide high standards of care in a family environment for all children and young people placed within the service. To provide safe, high quality foster care homes for children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals as well as promoting their health and general well-being. Foster carers make a hugely valuable contribution and are provided with preparation, training and support to carry out their role to maximum effect. Barnet has a recruitment strategy in place for foster carers which encompasses and promotes a diversity of backgrounds thus allowing the service to appropriately match children and young people to the most suitable adults. Barnet is committed to listening to the voice of each child and young person, assessing their needs and comprehensively planning to meet them. The Fostering Service will work in partnership with their families, foster carers, colleagues within the Council, and other agencies with the objective of delivering the best possible care and support to Looked After children and young people across the borough.

Barnet Fostering will achieve these aims by:

- Ensuring the service offered is based on statutory regulations, National minimum standards and principles and child centred practice.
- Foster carers will be given a handbook at approval which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities and standards
- Foster carers will have a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) to support and monitor the practice standards.
- Will provide excellent support and training opportunities to foster carers, by suitably experienced, skilled and qualified social work staff, managers, practitioners and support staff who are appropriately qualified, safeguard checked, registered with their professional regulatory bodies, and supported in all areas of professional development
- Ensuring foster carers provide good parenting for all children who are looked after. Children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.
- Being committed to placing children and young people with Barnet foster carers for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible.

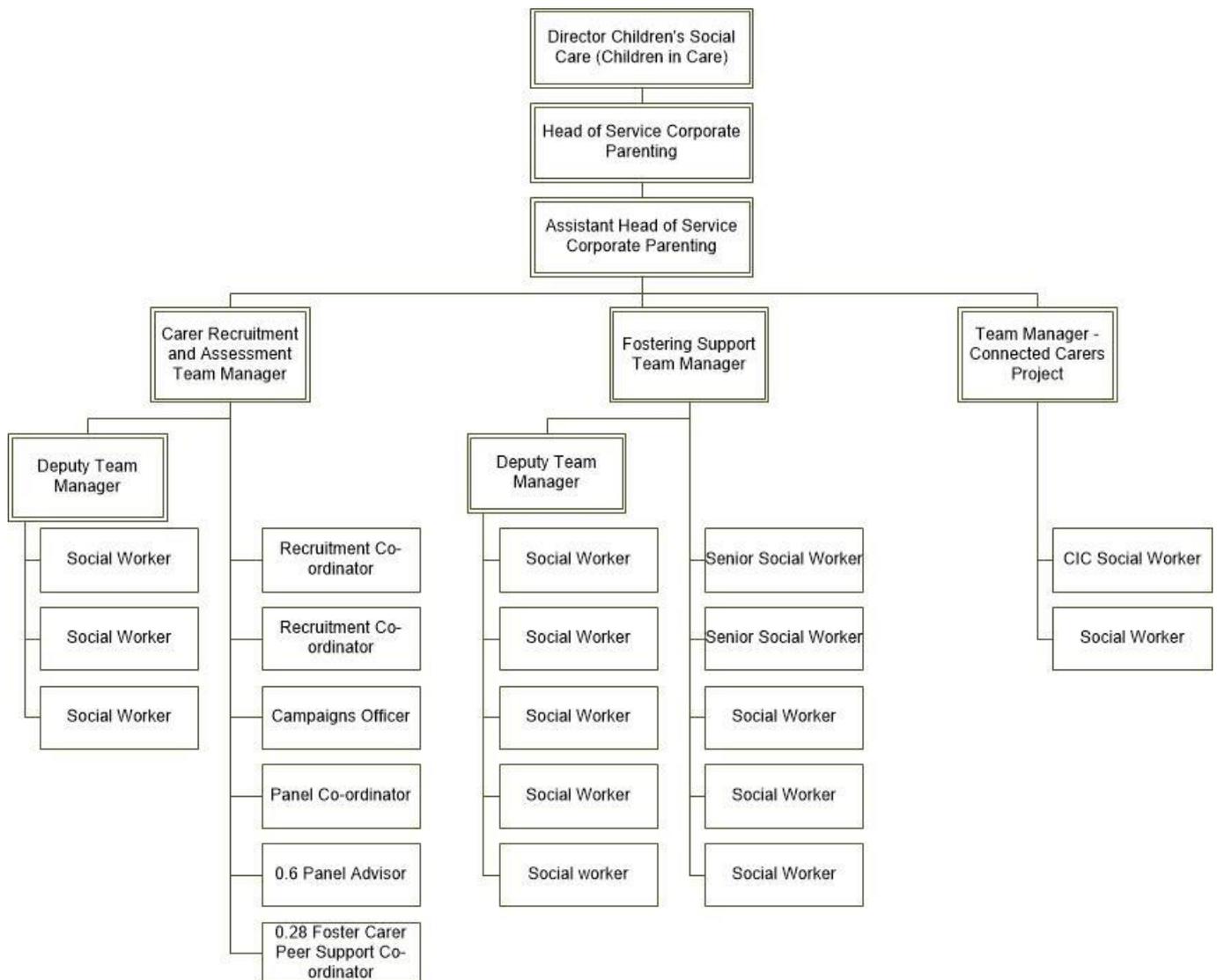
- Ensuring that long term matching with Barnet foster carers takes place without delay for children to strengthen the child's sense of belonging and permanence.
- The opportunity when carers and young people agree and it is agreed to be in the young person's best interest for the young person to "Stay put" in their foster home beyond the age of 18 years.

3. Objectives of the Fostering Service

- 3.1 To ensure compliance with Fostering Services Regulations 2011, as amended by The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. National Minimum Standards and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- 3.2 As part of the services provided to children and families, Barnet has an established 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 to help families manage in difficult situations.
- 3.3 Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. We maintain records on carers who are subject to National Standards and Data protection legislation.
- 3.4 We work in close partnership with the north London boroughs of Enfield, Haringey, Camden, Islington and Hackney, who constitute the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC). This includes sharing foster homes (with the foster carers' agreement), to maximise usage of our foster carers and collaborating on training and support for foster carers across the consortium.
- 3.5 To ensure there is a choice of high quality foster homes available to meet the complex and diverse needs of our children and young people.
- 3.6 To ensure that the needs of disabled children are included and understood within our fostering service.
- 3.7 For all our looked after children to grow up in a safe, loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- 3.8 Each foster home will meet the needs of the child set out in their annual assessment care plan. Wherever possible plans reflect the child's racial, cultural, religious and linguistic background. Siblings will be placed together, when it is recommended by a Together or Apart assessment and it is consistent with their needs and in line with their Care Plan.
- 3.9 The Fostering Service will actively encourage and support robust arrangements for contact with whoever the assessment and care plan recommend for a child.

3.10 Wherever possible the Fostering Service promotes local placements to promote continuity and maintain family networks.

4. Management of Services: Structure April 2019 and Staffing



The Fostering Service employs thirteen full time equivalent Social Workers across the fostering teams. The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting manages the Fostering services, Adoption and post permanency services, Care Recruitment and Assessment Service, Children in Care and Leaving Care.

5. Two 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 and assesses Special Guardianship applications.

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 Children's Workforce Development Team takes responsibility for the provision of training for approved foster carers. Foster carers are given access to relevant courses provided for staff.

An Independent Reviewing Officer (separately managed within the Safeguarding Section of the Children's Service) chairs all annual reviews of foster carers.

The Corporate Parenting Service is multi-disciplinary team that includes health, education and children's participation and project personnel. The team supports and promotes the interests and needs of Barnet's looked after children, with a holistic approach and a variety of special initiatives.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel, composed of members who can bring a broad range of perspectives to informing decisions made about the approval of fostering households and adopters; and reviews currently approved foster carers after their first year of fostering and in situations where standard of care concerns have resulted in a review. They also consider recommendations concerning significant changes of approval, including terminations.

The management group share responsibility for developing policy and procedure in line with national regulations and standards to ensure a safe and stimulating environment for Looked after children.

The Decision Maker for foster carers' approval is Operational Director - Family Services and the Head of Services of corporate parenting.

Service provision

At the time of writing Barnet has 108 approved foster carers. This number changes as carers, move on and as new carers are approved. This number is updated monthly and incorporated into Barnet's management information. In the year 2018/19, 33 new foster carers were recruited and 17 foster carers left the service.

6. There are Four Types of Fostering that Barnet Carers Provide

1. Short-term/Task-centred fostering, which is having children placed with foster carers for temporary periods, whilst their longer-term permanent arrangements are settled. Short-Term/Task-centred foster carers also provide respite placements for children in need of support and to support children from other fostering households.
2. Permanent fostering, where children are placed with the intention that they will be part of their foster carers' household until they are mature enough to live independently, this may include a period of "staying put" post 18. These families are formally matched at the Adoption and Fostering panel after six continual months with a specific family.
3. Connected Person / kinship foster caring, which is having children placed for fostering by someone who has a pre-existing relationship with them, usually a relative.
4. Parent and child fostering, when a parent and their young child is placed in the fostering household there is usually a 12-week assessment period.

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.

The Fostering Service has a Joint Panel shared with the adoption service. Assessment reports on prospective carers and connected carers are presented to the panel, who makes recommendations about the suitability of prospective carers to the Agency Decision-Maker. Prospective carers and kinship carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel.

7. Arranging Placements

Barnet's Fostering team works alongside the Placement team, in partnership with social workers and partners, to match children and young people requiring a foster home with approved carers from the Foster Carers' register. The fostering team is responsible for matching the assessment of the young person's needs and outcomes with the strengths of the approved carers.

Where possible foster homes are identified from Barnet registered foster carers. In the absence of appropriate foster carers within the borough, alternative families are sought from the consortium carers and then from independent Fostering Agencies.

Children are placed locally whenever possible, to avoid disrupting a child's education and for contact arrangements with birth family members and friends. 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.

Information about the child's needs and views are 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.

The child's Placement Plan is drawn up and reviewed with full involvement of the child and the foster carer. The Placement Plan sets out the child's day-to-day life require the involvement of the child's social worker are discussed. Subject to agreements, foster carers are given delegated authority for all routine aspects of day-to-day decision-making for the child/ren in their care.

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.

Both the child and their foster carer are central contributors to the statutory reviews of the child's Care Plan as part of the 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. If a child placed with a short-term/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.

8. Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

There is a recruitment strategy in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of local foster carers to meet the needs of Barnet Looked After children. Those enquiring about becoming a Barnet foster carer receives a prompt professional response.

Applicants for fostering are required to take part in the “Skills to Foster” preparation training. Fostering assessments are undertaken by an experienced and HCPC registered social worker from the Fostering Service.

Assessments of foster carers are carried out according to the format provided by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Form F) and Connected 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 task of fostering.

We aim to avoid delay in the assessment and approval of carers and timescales are monitored and are completed within six months of the enquirer submitting their application.

In the case of connected carers wishing to foster a child in care to Barnet, a viability assessment is undertaken and if the child is subsequently placed with the connected person, a full connected carer assessment is undertaken. Connected persons are foster carers for a specific child from the point the placement is made. In an emergency connected carers may be assessed under Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and receive temporary approval from the Agency Decision maker. Their post-placement assessment is completed within 16 weeks.

In addition to our recruitment publicity to the 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.

Assessment reports on prospective carers and connected carers are presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel, which makes recommendations about the suitability of prospective carers to the Agency Decision-Maker. Prospective carers and kinship carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel.

9. Training for Foster Carers

A foster carer’s handbook is provided to all new carers, which includes essential information about policies, procedures and guidance for foster carers.

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 on training that is available through reciprocal arrangements with five other London Boroughs, in the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium.

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.

Foster carers can train alongside social workers and staff from other local agencies, as well as having training especially provided for them. 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.

All carers are expected to complete their Training, Support and Development standards portfolio in their first year of fostering; and training and support is offered to help them achieve this goal. Where, for reasons of distance or other reasons, carers have difficulty attending Barnet's internal training, efforts are made to identify alternative learning options.

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.

10. Support for Foster Carers and Their Families

Each foster carer has a supervising social worker who provides on-going support and supervision. Visits to new carers generally are undertaken every week for the first 4 to 6 weeks after a child is placed, and additionally in response to needs.

For experienced carers, supervisory visits are undertaken at regular intervals at no more than 6 weekly reflecting the skills, experience of the foster carer and the needs of any children in their care. At least two unannounced visits will be undertaken annually, in accordance with regulations and guidance. The supervising social worker will maintain regular contact by telephone, email and correspondence, and will make additional visits as required.

The supervising social 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. Supervising social workers are allocated to connected carers from when the placement is made.

The supervising social worker will work alongside the foster carers to ensure that the experience and contribution of the foster carers birth children is recognised and

supported and valued in recognition of the invaluable contribution they make to the fostering task.

Outside usual office hours support can be accessed by foster carers through Barnet Fostering. Team manager or Head of Service is always on call to offer consultation and advice to foster carers and there is a 24-hour phone outreach service provided by fostering and residential staff.

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.

When foster carers need practical help to enable a child to move in or to be sustained, the Fostering Support and Development Team makes and/or enables arrangements for the additional support required.

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.

Barnet has a Skills Level Structure. New carers generally are initially approved as Level 1 but 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.

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 is in place whereby funds are made available to Foster Carers to support home improvements.

11. Additional Support to Carers and to Children in Placement

The Virtual School for children in care offers education support for all children in care, to ensure all children in care have at least 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.

The children in care teams have clinicians within the service who provide a variety of therapeutic services to children and foster carers.

The contact service for Barnet provides supervisors and venues for contact sessions that need to be held outside of the child's foster home. This is in a dedicated contact centre.

Barnet services automatically register foster carers as members of the Fostering Network, which provides them with access to independent information, consultation, legal advice, indemnity insurance against liability claims, etc.

There is a Fostering Care Association BAFCA which is run by foster carers, supported by the Local Authority

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.

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 who foster.

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.

Children have access to an independent Children's Rights Service which can be particularly helpful in supporting children to provide their views, wishes and feelings to statutory reviews.

12. Reviews of Foster Carers

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 Quality Assurance service.

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 Adoption and Fostering Panel. 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.

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

13. Termination of Approval

Occasionally the Fostering Service will form the view that the standard of care provided by a carer does not meet the required level. Depending on the severity of the issue additional training/support may be provided in the first instance. However, the matter may be presented to the Panel. The carer will have an opportunity to express their views and will consider all the information provided to it. The foster carer will be encouraged to access advice and support from the Fostering Network in these circumstances and a personal advocate may be appointed to the foster carer. If the Panel reaches a recommendation that the carer is unsuitable to continue fostering, their recommendation will go to the ADM who will form a qualifying determination. If this is to terminate approval, a letter is then sent to the carer stating the decision and giving reasons. The foster carer then has 28 days within which to make representation to the decision maker or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review on behalf of the Secretary of State.

14. Complaints and Allegations

Foster carers are given a Complaints and Complements leaflet, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint/compliment when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement. Foster carers are entitled to use the Departmental Complaints Procedure.

Complaints will be resolved informally where possible, by the Supervising Social Worker or their manager. When this is not possible, it may be helpful to seek a second opinion from outside the team. Carers should be advised that, if not satisfied with the response, that they may take it to the Head of Service Corporate Parenting or the Department's Complaints Officer:

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. Learning from complaints and compliments is included in the training for staff and carers.

15. Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The LADO role is outlined in *Working Together 2018* and is in place to ensure that allegations against Foster Carers or members of their household are progressed in a timely and appropriate way. The LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) should be made aware of all cases in which it is alleged that a person has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child; or possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or

- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

Foster carers who are subject to investigation are provided with independent support.

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.

16. Monitoring Performance

OFSTED is responsible for having an overview of the Fostering Service. They undertake regular inspections of the Children 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.

17. Further Information

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).

The Children's Service Complaints Officer is based at North London Business Park (NLBP) and is contactable on 0208 359 7008.

Staying put - link - [url:http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs-staying_put.pdf](http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs-staying_put.pdf)

Connected carers / kinship policy

[url:http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs/values.html](http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs/values.html).

Advocacy and independent visitor – link -

[url:http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs/p_advocay.html](http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs/p_advocay.html).

BAFCA [url:http://www.facebook.com/group/barnetfca/IndependentReviewingOfficer](http://www.facebook.com/group/barnetfca/IndependentReviewingOfficer)

(IRO) link - [url:http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs/files/irohandbook.pdf](http://www.proceduresonline.com/barnet/fs/files/irohandbook.pdf)

National Minimum Standards 2011 link - [url:http://www.gov.uk/government/.../fostering-services-national-minimum-standards](http://www.gov.uk/government/.../fostering-services-national-minimum-standards).