

Document control	
Document title	London Borough of Barnet Fostering statement of Purpose
Document description	The Fostering Statement of Purpose sets out the Local Authorities duties and functions in relation to Fostering and the ways in which they will carry it out.
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1. Introduction

Why does Barnet provide a Statement of Purpose and what are the functions?

The Statement of Purpose has been written in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and relevant statutory provisions.

The statement fulfils the requirements of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (Care Standards Act 2000) and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and regulations Volume 4. There is a requirement 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, the governing principles and about who manages and provides the service.

This statement is intended to provide a clear description of the London Borough of Barnet's Fostering Service for:

- Children and young people living with London Borough of Barnet foster carers
- Foster carers and prospective foster carers (includes foster carers' own children)
- Local authorities which place, have placed, or are considering placing children with London Borough of Barnet foster carers.
- Barnet Family Services staff who are involved in providing services to Looked After Children and young people
- The public – a copy of our statement of purpose will be placed on our Website and available on request.

Our vision is for all the children in the care 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 finding a home for children, who are not able to remain with their birth family, with an appropriate alternative family wherever possible. This alternative arrangement may be with a family member or friend as connected carers or with foster carers.

Legislative and Policy Framework

Barnet Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- The Care Planning and Fostering regulations 2015
- The Care Standards Act 2015 • The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 & Amendments July 2013.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010
- Family & Friends Guidance (2010)
- Transition to Adulthood Guidance (2010) including Staying Put
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption & Fostering) regulations 2009
- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006

2. Aims of the Fostering Service

Barnet's Fostering Service is committed to provide a range of foster carers that provide the highest standards of care in a family environment for children and young people in the care of Barnet Council. To provide safe, high quality foster care homes for children and young people that will value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals, promoting their health and general well-being and enhancing and maximising their life opportunities and experiences.

Relationships are prioritised and the aim is for children and young people to live with local foster carers where relationships with family, friends, professionals and community can be maintained. Where this is not possible or not considered to be in the child or young person's best interest an appropriate alternative that can meet their needs to a high standard will be sought outside of the London Borough of Barnet's resources.

London Borough of Barnet is committed to provide for sibling groups so that they can remain together where appropriate and will always respect and promote the children and young people's culture and identity. Each child and young person will have a needs

assessment completed prior to moving to a foster carer to ensure the best possible match to meet their needs.

Barnet is committed to provide each foster carer with excellent preparation, training and support to carry out their role to maximum effect. Their contribution to the wellbeing and development of our children is central to what we want to achieve for the children in our care and they are supported by highly skilled and experienced qualified staff.

Barnet's Fostering Service is responsive to the needs of the community and has a robust recruitment strategy in place for foster carers which encompasses and promotes a diversity of backgrounds thus allowing the service to offer a range of options that appropriately match the needs of our children and young people.

Barnet is committed to listening and understanding the voice of each child, young person and foster carer. The Fostering Service work in partnership with their families, foster carers, colleagues within the Council, and other agencies with the shared aim and objective of delivering the best possible care and support to the children and young people in the care of Barnet.

3. Objectives of the Fostering Service

To ensure compliance with Fostering Services Regulations 2011, as amended by The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Service (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. National Minimum Standards and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010

We work in close partnership with the north London Boroughs of Enfield, Haringey, Camden, Islington and Hackney, who constitute the North London Fostering Consortium (NLFC). This includes sharing foster homes (with the foster carers' agreement), to maximise usage of our foster carers, ensure the best placement match and collaborating on training and support for foster carers across the consortium.

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.

The ensure that the needs of disabled children are included and understood within our fostering service.

For all our Children to grow up in a safe, loving environment that can meet their needs. Each foster home will meet the needs of the child set out in their annual assessment care plan, 'All about me'. Wherever possible plans reflect the child's racial, cultural, religious and linguistic background. We strive to always place siblings together unless assessed otherwise.

The Fostering Service will actively encourage and support robust arrangements for family contact with whomever are assessed to be safe and appropriate to have contact with the child or young person.

The Fostering service will prepare, supervise and train Foster Carers to enable them to provide high quality care. As well as ensuring regular monitoring and review of placements. Foster carers are clear about their role and expectations. That they receive a handbook at approval which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities and standards. Ensuring all foster carers sign the Foster Care Agreement and London Borough of Barnet's Foster Carer Charter.

To optimise a robust recruitment campaign that is based upon expert knowledge of the demographics of the children in our care and the analysis of their needs, in order to ensure choice and opportunity to have the right placement option at the right time for the child or young person.

Decision making and management in accordance with Regulation 6 and 27 is delegated to the Head of Service. The Fostering panel is established in accordance with Regulation 23 and chaired by an experienced independent chair. The Agency Decision Maker is the Director of Children's Social Care and Head of Service for Corporate Parenting.

The Fostering service will ensure that anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practices are firmly embedded across the fostering service for everyone.

Ensuring foster carers are provided with full information about the child or young person. That the particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs are fully understood. Foster carers have a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) to support and monitor the practice standards.

We will engage and consult the children and young people in our care and encouraging them to actively participate in their care and family life.

We are committed to placing children and young people with Barnet foster carers in order for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible. Ensuring that the significance of family contact is understood, recognised and promoted where appropriate and safe.

We will ensure that long term matching with foster carers takes place without delay for children and young people to strengthen their sense of belonging and permanence. Providing the opportunity when appropriate for young people to “Stay put” in their foster home beyond the age of 18 years.

We will ensure that partnership working is effective and positively involves all in the child or young person’s life as appropriate.

4. The Foster Carers' Charter:

Ensuring children and young people in our care flourish and thrive is at the heart of our resilience-based practice approach in Barnet. To achieve this, we know that it is fundamental that children and young people in our care are provided with excellent foster carers, that know what is expected of them and what they can expect from Barnet's Fostering Support Service and Barnet Council. In order to achieve this we must ensure that we all share our vision and commitment.

Our Foster Carers charter is an agreement between Barnet, in our role as corporate parent and our foster carers.

Purpose

The purpose of Barnet's foster care charter is:

- To ensure that everyone involved within the child or young person's life is child focused and striving for their best long-term interests
- To represent our commitment as corporate parents
- To reinforce communication and partnership working between everyone involved in the child and young person's life.
- To ensure that our foster carers are supported to provide the best care for our children and young people.
- Our Charter is owned by us all, as our promise to always strive for excellence and best practice.

Our Core Values

1. Children and Young people are at the heart of everything
2. Working in partnership
3. Communication and Consultation
4. Support
5. Effective decisions making
6. Learning and development

5. Management of Services: Staffing April 2023

Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

Team Manager

1 Advanced Practitioner

2 Social Workers

1 Marketing and recruitment Officer

Fostering Support Team

Team Manager

1 Deputy Team Manager

5.25 Social Workers

Carer Assessment Team

Team Manager

1 Advanced Practitioner

5 Social Workers

Carer Support Team

Team Manager

1.75 Advance Practitioners

3 family Support Practitioners

6. Staffing

The Fostering Recruitment Team is responsible for recruiting, training and assessing and supporting applicants who wish to become foster carers or supported lodging hosts.

The Fostering Support Team is responsible for offering on-going supervision and support for all foster carers (includes our task centred or long term foster carers, supported lodgings hosts, Staying put and connected person's carers). They encourage and support the development of foster carers throughout their fostering career.

The Carer assessment team is responsible for assessing connected person's and undertaking Special Guardianship assessments.

The Children's Workforce Development Team takes responsibility for the provision of training for approved foster carers.

An Independent Reviewing Officer who is managed within the Safeguarding Service within Family Services, is responsible for the annual review of each Fostering family.

The Fostering Panel is composed of members, including an independent Fostering Panel chair, who bring a broad range of perspectives, knowledge and experience that inform the panel's recommendations -for foster carer approvals and first year review of currently approved foster carers -and where standard of care concerns have resulted in a review of the foster carer's approval. They also consider recommendations concerning significant changes of approval, including terminations.

The Agency Decision Maker for fostering is the Director of Children Social Care and the Head of Service of Corporate Parenting who deputises for the Director. The registered manager for the Fostering Service under Regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulation is the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting.

7. Types of Fostering

1. Short-term fostering, is having children placed with foster carers for temporary periods, whilst their longer-term permanent arrangements are settled. Short-Term foster carers also provide respite placements for children in need of support and to support children from other fostering households.
2. Emergency Foster care – are carers who can offer placements at short notice including outside of usual office hours.
3. Long term / Permanent fostering, is where the child's care arrangement either progresses to a long term arrangement or where children remain with their initial foster carer 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 Fostering panel after six continual months with a specific family.
4. Connected Person / kinship fostering, is where children live in the care of someone who has a pre-existing relationship with them, usually a relative or close family friend.
5. Private Fostering, which is where a child under 16 (18 if they have a disability) is looked after by someone that their parents or whoever has parental responsibility have agreed for more than 28 days. This person is someone that is not the child's, parent or legal step-parent, grandparent or sibling. These carers are not approved as foster carers but are required to inform the Local Authority and should be visited by the Authority on a regular basis.
6. Specialist Fostering, where a child or young person may have specific emotional, psychological or physical needs that may require more intensive support. This includes children with a disability and those that may have previously lived in a residential setting.
7. Parent and child fostering, where a parent and their young child is placed in the fostering household together usually for a 12-week assessment period.
8. Supported Lodging Host, where a young person over the age of 16 years is offered a supportive home environment in order to continue to develop their independence skills without feeling pressurised to live independently before they are ready. Supportive Lodging Hosts are not approved as foster carers and have a different assessment process (see below)

8. Arranging Placements

Barnet's Fostering team works alongside the Placement team, in partnership with social workers and partner agencies, 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 North London 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 confirm care arrangements that reflect the key components of a child's identity. Children will be matched with a family that 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 foster family 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 how the child's day-to-day life requirements will be met by the child's professional network and family. 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 logs and weekly / 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 individual's 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 care arrangement. If a child is with a short-term/task-centred foster carer and later requires a long-term carer, their foster carer will always be considered as a

potential permanent carer for that child if that is their wish, whilst also taking into account the child or young person's wishes, views and needs.

9. Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

A recruitment strategy is in place that supports the recruitment of a range of local foster carers to meet the needs of the children in Barnet's care. Whilst all restrictions have now changed in regard to the Covid pandemic, this is still a changing landscape and therefore Barnet's recruitment strategy is reviewed and updated quarterly.

Those enquiring about becoming a Barnet foster carer receive 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 appropriately qualified and experienced social worker.

All relevant checks are carried out and references obtained. A thorough report is prepared (FORM F Assessment) based upon the ability of prospective carers.

In the case of connected carers wishing to foster a child in our care, a viability assessment is undertaken and if the child subsequently moves to be cared for by the connected person, a full connected carer assessment is undertaken. Connected carers are foster carers for a specific child from the point the care arrangement 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 - 24 weeks.

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

10. Fostering Panel

The Fostering panel have several important functions such as:

Making recommendations on approval of foster carer and any terms of approval which is then considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the final decision.

To consider the first Annual review of all newly approved foster carers. Other annual Foster Carer reviews (AFCR) may be presented at the discretion of the Fostering Service.

To consider and make a recommendation on the continued approval of the foster carer after a significant change in the fostering household or following any investigation into any allegations made against the foster carers.

To consider any variations of approval following a risk assessment in some circumstances, such as placing children outside of the existing foster carers approval limits.

To make recommendation on Long-Term fostering matches, – the ADM will make the final decision

11. Training for Foster Carers

An electronic foster carer's handbook is available to all 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 commission post approval training courses for staff and foster carers.

Foster carers are issued with a comprehensive programme of training both pre-approval and post approval, 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 (TSD) portfolio in their first year of fostering (18 months for Connected Carers) and training and support is offered to help them achieve this goal. All foster carers have a personal development plan which is reviewed annually.

Connected carers 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.

12. Support for Foster Carers and Their Families

All foster carers have a supervising social worker allocated to them who provides on-going support and supervision. There is a duty system in place for when allocated Supervising social workers are absent.

Newly approved carers are allocated an experienced foster carer to act as a “Buddy” for as long as is required and are encouraged to maintain this support relationship ongoing.

An Out of Hours Telephone support line, run by experienced workers is available to foster carers between 5:30pm and 10pm, 7 days a week, as well as the Emergency Duty team which operates outside of usual working hours year-round.

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. Carer forums occur bi-monthly and are attended by senior management to provide updates and hear from foster carers.

Each foster carer is supported to engage with a Personal Development plan (See above)

Barnet has a Skills Level Structure. New carers 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.

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 Foster Carer Association BAFCA which is run by foster carers, supported by the Local Authority and re-launched in 2023.

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.

13. Reviews of Foster Carers and Safeguarding checks

In line with Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 each fostering household has an annual review. The review is carried out by an Independent Reviewing Officer located in the Safeguarding service and incorporates a report from the supervising social worker, feedback from the child or young person, their parents, social workers, foster carers as well as the foster carer's own children and other relevant professionals.

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.

As part of these reviews Disclosure and Barring services (DBS) and medical checks are completed at three yearly intervals. Health and Safety checks are completed annually, and the Safe caring policy is updated at each review or upon the arrival on a new placement.

It is now also advised that agencies undertake an internet check of applicants with their consent, when considering the approval of foster carers.

14. 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 concern, additional training/support may be provided in the first instance or the matter may be presented to the Fostering Panel. Prior to attending the Fostering Panel, the foster carer will have an opportunity to express their views and to consider all the information that has been provided to the panel.

In these instances, the foster carer will be encouraged to access advice and support from the Fostering Network and a personal advocate / Union Rep may be appointed to the foster carer. If the Panel reaches a recommendation that the carer is not suitable to continue fostering, their recommendation will go to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who will form a qualifying determination.

If this is to terminate a Foster Carers 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.

15. Complaints and Compliments

All complaints are taken seriously, and foster carers are made aware of the procedure in relation to complaints.

Complaints will be resolved informally where possible, by the Supervising Social Worker or their manager. Foster Carers are advised that, if not satisfied with the response, they are able to take their complaint to the Assistant Head of Service or Head of Service for Corporate Parenting or the Department's Complaints Officer.

Learning from complaints and compliments enables Barnet to continually improve the delivery of service and is also included in the training for staff and foster carers.

16. Allegations against foster carers

Barnet has a clear and robust protocol should an allegation be made against a foster carer or member of the fostering household.

The LADO role is outlined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (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.

Barnet recognised the impact any investigation can have upon foster carers when they are subject to an allegation. Foster carers who are subject to an 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.

17. Monitoring Performance

Barnet has a number of mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the performance of the service. This includes staff and foster carer supervisions, twice yearly unannounced visits to the foster carer home, tracking systems to ensure checks are completed in a timely manner and appropriately, and the Agency Decision Maker reviews all new approvals, matches and annual reviews presented to panel.

The service completes foster carer surveys, foster carer consultation groups, evaluation and analysis of Fostering enquiries, audits and receives Fostering Panel feedback and Fostering Panel reports are quality assured of by the Fostering Panel Advisor.

The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting reports to the Placements Board that provides senior leadership oversight on performance and outcomes and the Council's governance arrangement for Fostering sits with the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel.

OFSTED regulates and inspects the Fostering Service as part of the inspection of Children's Social Care Services. During the inspection Ofsted will seek confidential feedback from service users, carers, and placing social workers. OFSTED are alerted to any significant incidents in the Fostering Service.

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