

London Borough of Hackney

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

November 2015

Hackney Children and Young People's Services

Working together to improve the lives
of children and young people

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Introduction

Under the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards, Hackney's fostering service is required to have a statement of purpose that sets out the aims and objectives of local fostering services. A copy of the statement of purpose is provided to Ofsted, the government agency responsible for regulating and inspecting fostering services.

The statement of purpose is available on Hackney Council's website: www.hackney.gov.uk/fostering. It is made available to foster carers, looked after children and fostering agency partners. It is also shared with members of the Fostering Panel and staff working in the fostering service.

This statement is reviewed regularly and updated to include changes in legislation as well as changes and developments in the service.

Related documents including Hackney's 'Family and Friends Care' policy and 'Private Fostering Statement of Purpose' are also available on the Council's website, or upon request from the Safeguarding and Learning service.

Aims and objectives of the service

Hackney fostering service operates in line with the National Minimum Standards (NMS) of the Care Standards Act 2004, the Fostering Regulations 2011, the Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.

The overall aim of Hackney's fostering service is to provide the best quality of service that will meet the needs of our looked after children placed in foster care. In order to meet this aim, Hackney Children and Young People's Services are committed to do the following:

- Ensure that all children looked after by Hackney have the best possible opportunities to thrive and achieve;
- Recruit foster carers with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences able and willing to meet the needs of our looked after children;
- Ensure that Hackney responds fairly to all enquiries from potential foster carers promptly without any prejudice or discrimination related to their age, religion, ethnicity or sexual preference;
- Develop in-house placement provision to meet the current and future needs of Hackney's looked after children population through effective recruitment, training and support;
- Ensure that all foster carer reviews are meaningful and carried out within the specified timescale;
- Collaborate with Hackney Foster Carers' Council (HFCC) to meet the commitments agreed in the Hackney Foster Carers Charter;
- Encourage young people to participate in the development of Hackney's services via 'Hackney gets Heard' (Hackney's Children in Care Council); and
- Recruit outstanding staff to the fostering service and support them through appropriate training, supervision and development opportunities to provide the best possible service to foster carers and the children and young people we support.

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Management and staffing structure

Fostering is part of the Corporate Parenting service within Hackney Children and Young People's Service. The service consists of four units:

Fostering Recruitment is responsible for the recruitment and training of foster carers.

Two Fostering Support Units (FSUs) provide supervision and support services to Hackney foster carers and work closely with the Hackney Foster Carers' Council.

The Placement Management Unit (PMU) commissions all placements for looked after children and care leavers. It seeks the most appropriate placement for each child, whether with an in-house carer, independent fostering agency carer or a residential placement. The 'Looked After Children Register' is accessible on Mosaic and updated by the PMU based on the information received from the social work units.

All managers and social workers are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), hold a relevant social work qualification, have undertaken post-qualifying training and have relevant experience of working with children and families.

Hackney Fostering Service Management Structure

Name	Position
Sheila Durr	Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Service
Sarah Wright	Head of Safeguarding, Corporate Parenting and Learning and Agency Decision Maker
Sonya Kalyniak	Service Manager, Fostering Service
Sally Plant Soulmaz Bashirinia Kirsty Barnard	Practice Development Managers (PDM) in the Fostering Units
Queensley Umboza	Business Manager, Placement Management Unit
Peter Howes	Independent Panel Adviser

The fostering service is committed to post-qualification training and all staff are encouraged to attend training events to develop and refresh their skills. The staff group has a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience and is continually seeking to develop these to promote service improvement. The staff group is culturally and racially diverse and is reflective of the population that we serve in Hackney.

Placements provided

The fostering service provides a number of distinct placement types:

Planned placements

Planned placements can be short term or for longer periods, and even 'permanent' placements to take a child through to adulthood.

Emergency placements

Emergency placements are unplanned, occur at very short notice and are required when it is deemed to be in a child's best interest to be urgently removed from their current home and given an immediate foster placement.

Staying Put placements

Sometimes children stay with their foster carers beyond 18, particularly when they are likely to access tertiary education provision.

Short Breaks

Short breaks are usually accessed by children with disabilities. These placements generally offer a regular place for children to stay in order to give a break to the person with parental responsibility. It is unusual for a child to access more than 75 nights per year with these arrangements.

Respite Care

Respite care can be used to maintain a longer term placement and is used when carers require a break. Respite care should only be used when it is clearly in the child's best interest and not as a regular 'holiday' for a long term placement.

Inter-agency Placements

Occasionally Hackney is approached by other local authorities seeking specialisms that we may be able to provide. In such instances, Hackney maintains the registration and supervision of the carer.

Connected Persons Placements

When a relative or friend of the family offers to look after the child, the case holding social work unit will conduct a viability assessment. If the outcome is successful, the fostering service will undertake a fostering assessment and successful carers will be utilised as registered carers for that specific child.

Other Placements

Hackney is looking to expand the fostering options within the 'in-house' service and plan to increase the numbers of all types of carers over the next year. Hackney also plan to recruit some specialist carers. These will include:

- Specialist carers for parent and baby placements – normally designed to help Hackney assess the options for young parents and their children;
- Carers for young people on remand – court-ordered placement options which will offer family based care to young people at risk of incarceration; and
- Carers for teenagers – particular high support placements for young people with challenging behaviours.

Hackney is a member of the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium and some of the specialist placement options will be coordinated through the consortium.

Safeguarding

A child's safety and welfare is paramount and foster care should provide children and young people with a chance to grow up in a safe, secure family environment that meets their needs and helps them develop to their full potential.

All looked after children placed in foster care are subject to regular independently chaired statutory reviews in line with the Care Planning Regulations 2011.

An enhanced training programme is available for foster carers including training on safeguarding and understanding risk, child sexual exploitation, and missing children.

Clear policies are in place to protect children and offer guidance to foster carers and staff in key areas such as child protection, bullying, and health and safety.

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Risk assessments are completed where necessary and reviewed regularly. Complaints against foster carers will be robustly investigated; however foster carers will receive appropriate support during this process. All complaints are recorded and reviewed in line with procedural guidelines. Foster carers also have access to the council's complaints procedure. Standards of care procedures will be used in the event of concerns about a foster carer's ability to care appropriately for a child placed with them.

Children's Social Care staff are provided with safeguarding training as part of the ongoing professional training and development programme.

Children's health

The fostering service works to promote the health and development of children and young people living in foster care.

Health care information for each child is provided to foster carers prior to the child being placed and once the child is in placement (at the Placement Planning Meeting). We ensure that foster carers are made aware of any current health, illness or medication issues related to children placed with them and that this is captured in the placement plan.

Foster carers are provided with information packs which contain information on a range of health care issues. Training is provided for foster carers on promoting the health and wellbeing, emotional health and sexual health of looked after children and young people.

It is an expectation that all children and young people placed in foster care are required to be registered with a GP and dentist, if they are not already registered. Foster carers are made aware of their obligation and responsibility to support children to attend medical, dental and other health care appointments.

The fostering service works with the looked after children's health team to ensure that each child and young person has access to the full range of universal, targeted and specialist health services available in Hackney.

Promoting educational achievement

The fostering service prepares and encourages foster carers to promote and support each child's educational achievement whilst in a placement.

Foster carers attend parents' meetings and school open days and maintain regular contact with the schools of the children they look after. Foster carers are consulted and included in educational plans for the children they look after and this includes participating in Personal Education Plan (PEP) and education review meetings.

Foster carers ensure that they are supporting children's education at home by helping with homework, reading to children and playing an active role in a child's education, including facilitating a quiet space where a child can study.

Each foster home is supported by the local authority to provide a computer in the home for the looked after child or young person to use and help with their learning needs.

The fostering service works closely with Hackney's 'Virtual School for Looked After Children', the service provides additional, personalised support through one to one tuition and other activities that enable children and young people to fulfil their potential.

Preparation for adulthood

The fostering service provides training for foster carers to help develop their skills on how best to help young people prepare for adulthood and independent living. Carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences, information, skills and advice that will support them in this objective.

Leaving Care social work units within the Corporate Parenting service provide targeted support to young people leaving care and those preparing to leave care to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood.

Each young person is included in making plans for their future and this process is called pathway planning. A young person's pathway plan will include information about accommodation, education or training needs, and any support a young person needs. Foster carers are also consulted and involved in the process.

Contact with family and friends

Maintaining links for a child with their family, friends and other social and community groups is important. All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that these links are maintained and developed (if that is in the child's best interest). Foster carers should support children with contact arrangements and where safe to do so, foster carers should take children to contact sessions or facilitate contact within the home.

Recruitment of foster carers

The fostering service is committed to increasing the number of in-house foster carers within Hackney. We are exploring new ways of recruiting foster carers and are working with a partner organisation.

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The North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium undertakes joint fostering recruitment activities in the form of advertising, information sessions and a joint website, which helps Hackney reach a wider audience of prospective foster carers.

All enquiries from members of the public in relation to becoming a foster carer will be referred to our partner organisation, which will provide further information about the different types of fostering, the assessment and approval process.

Assessment of foster carers

Assessment of prospective foster carers is carried out in line with fostering regulations and National Minimum Standards. An initial home visit takes place followed by the completion of an application form and the necessary statutory and personal reference checks on all household members aged over 16 years. All applicants are required to attend the three day '*Skills to Foster*' training which is held every other month as part of the assessment process.

A full assessment is then carried out and the information will be considered by the Fostering Panel.

Fostering Panel - Approval of foster carers

The Fostering Panel is an independent statutory panel and has representation from a wide range of experience and interests. The panel is constituted in line with fostering regulations and operates in a way that promotes equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices. The panel is headed by an independent chair to ensure an objective view of the fostering process.

All completed prospective foster carer assessments are presented to the fostering panel for consideration and recommendation. All panel recommendations are passed to the Agency Decision Maker (Hackney's Head of Safeguarding, Corporate Parenting and Learning) who makes the final decision whether to approve (or not approve) an applicant.

Matching of children with foster carers

Hackney takes great care to match children appropriately with their carers.

In order to do so, the assessment of the child's needs and the accompanying referral need to be comprehensive with clear outcomes defined.

The referral is completed by the case-holding social work unit which is quality assured by the Placement Management Unit (PMU). The PMU is responsible for procuring all placements on behalf of the council.

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To review the placement availability of in-house carers, the PMU has access to the 'Foster Carer Register' where all vacancies are clearly presented (the register is updated by the Fostering Support Units).

Partnership working

Hackney is part of the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium with fostering services from Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, and Islington Councils. The consortium aims to improve services and share resources across North London. This includes shared recruitment activities, training and fostering placements.

Training provided to foster carers

Hackney's fostering service is committed to providing continuous professional development and training opportunities that are relevant and accessible for all foster carers. A comprehensive programme of training has been developed to support foster carers throughout their journey from pre to post approval.

Prospective foster carers will undertake the three day 'Skills to Foster' preparation training. Once approved, foster carers will be supported in completing the statutory Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards¹ as set out by the Department for Education. All foster carers are required to meet the TSD standards within their first 12 months of approval (or 18 months for Connected Person Carers). Ongoing training will be identified in collaboration between the foster carer and the Fostering Support Unit.

Every approved foster carer has a 'Foster Carer's Contract' which clearly outlines the contractual relationship and agreement between foster carers and the London Borough of Hackney Fostering Service.

Support provided to foster carers

Supervision

Each foster carer is allocated to a Fostering Support Unit (FSU) and a lead worker is allocated as the main supervisor for the foster carer. The lead worker will be the main person who visits the carer regularly to provide supervision. This lead worker will also attend all key meetings regarding a child in placement and be available to offer support when needed. Following a supervision visit, the lead worker will complete a supervision report which will be shared with the carer.

Access to therapeutic consultation or support

¹<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare/fostercarestand/b00203661/nationalstandardsforfostercarers>

Within Hackney's Children and Young Person's Service we have access to Clinical Practitioners who have a range of qualifications and experiences. Depending on the needs of the carer and/or child, we can refer to a Clinical Psychologist or Systemic Family Therapist to seek consultation for a carer or more in-depth therapeutic support.

Peer mentoring

The fostering service has set up a buddy scheme so that newly approved carers can be paired with a more experienced foster carer within the first year of approval.

Support Groups

Hackney Foster Carers' Council (HFCC) is an independent organisation which aims to ensure that all foster families are well supported by sharing information, providing guidance and offering friendship. Hackney also holds regular Foster Carer Forums facilitated by the fostering service. The forums enable timely sharing of relevant information and provide foster carers with an opportunity to share their views and help shape the fostering service.

Membership of Fostering Organisations

All foster carers have an annual subscription to the 'Fostering Network' paid for by the department. This offers regular mailings, information and helplines on matters relating to foster care and is accessible directly and independently by foster carers.

Fees and allowances

Foster carers receive an allowance to help with the costs of caring for children in the placement as well as a fee for caring for the child. The foster carer fees and allowance scheme is reviewed and published annually.

Record keeping for foster carers

All foster carers are required to keep and maintain comprehensive up to date records relating to each child or young person in their care. Further guidance is included in Hackney's *Policy on Information Sharing and Record Keeping for Foster Carers*.

Review of foster carers

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 state that foster carers must have a review of their work at least once a year. A review can be held at any other time if there has been a significant change in circumstances or if concerns arise. The review is an opportunity for the foster carer, fostering social worker

and Independent Reviewing Officer to consider and reflect on the strengths and any areas of difficulties for the carer or with children in placement over the past year. The review will also consider recommendations regarding the foster carer's training needs and potential changes to their approval status.

Health and Safety checks are completed annually and enhanced DBS checks and medical assessments are completed once every three years. If a carer is older than 65 years old, a medical assessment is completed annually. An additional medical assessment may also be requested if there are any concerns or changes in the carers' health that may impact on their ability to foster.

The first review is presented to the Fostering Panel and the Panel considers whether to recommend re-approval of each foster carer. The foster carer attends the Fostering Panel with their fostering social worker.

If any issues are identified through these reviews, the fostering service will put support in place to try to resolve this. If these do not work, then a termination of approval status may be considered. Appropriate documentation will be presented to the Fostering Panel with clear and complete evidence as to the reasons for recommending termination of approval. The panel will also consider any written response to this evidence from the foster carer. The panel will then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker, based on the evidence presented.

Number of foster carers

As at 31 March 2015, there were 112 fostering households in Hackney approved for 141 placements. These included:

- 78 mainstream households
- 26 Connected Person carers
- 8 exclusive short breaks household

Number of children in placement

As at 31 March 2015, there were 109 children and young people in placements, with 80 children and young people placed with Hackney foster carers and 29 placed with Connected Person carers.

Complaints and outcomes

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the fostering service, Hackney welcomes and encourages feedback from service users, providers and partner agencies.

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Hackney Council has a complaints procedure which sets out the process in relation to the three stages of our complaints investigation process.

A copy of our complaints leaflet is sent to all newly approved foster carers.

Records of investigations and the outcome of complaints are held by the Safeguarding and Learning service and the information is used for quality assurance monitoring and service improvement.

From April 2014 to March 2015 we received two complaints relating to the Fostering Service, both of which were resolved at stage 1.

Useful contacts

Information on how to make a complaint can be obtained from:

Safeguarding and Learning Service
London Borough of Hackney
Hackney Service Centre
1 Hillman Street
London
E8 1DY

Tel: 0208 356 5800

Email: children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk

Information is also available to view at:

www.hackney.gov.uk/Childrens-Social-Care-Complaints

Hackney Fostering Service is inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). They can be contacted at:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231 (Children's Services)

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Hackney Foster Carers Council

Email: hackneyfostercarerscouncil@gmail.com

Website: www.hackneyfostercarers.co.uk

Fostering Network

87 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8HA

Tel: 020 7620 6400

Email: info@fostering.net

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

Contract Manager,
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
Unit 4,
Pavilion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road,
Wortley,
LEEDS
LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0113 202 2080

Hackney Fostering Service

Hackney Service Centre
1 Hillman Street
E8 1DY

Phone: 08000 730 418 / 020 8356 7825

Email: fostering@hackney.gov.uk

Website: www.hackney.gov.uk/fostering