



FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**Fostering Services (England) Regulations
2011**

**31 March
2020**



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1. Introduction

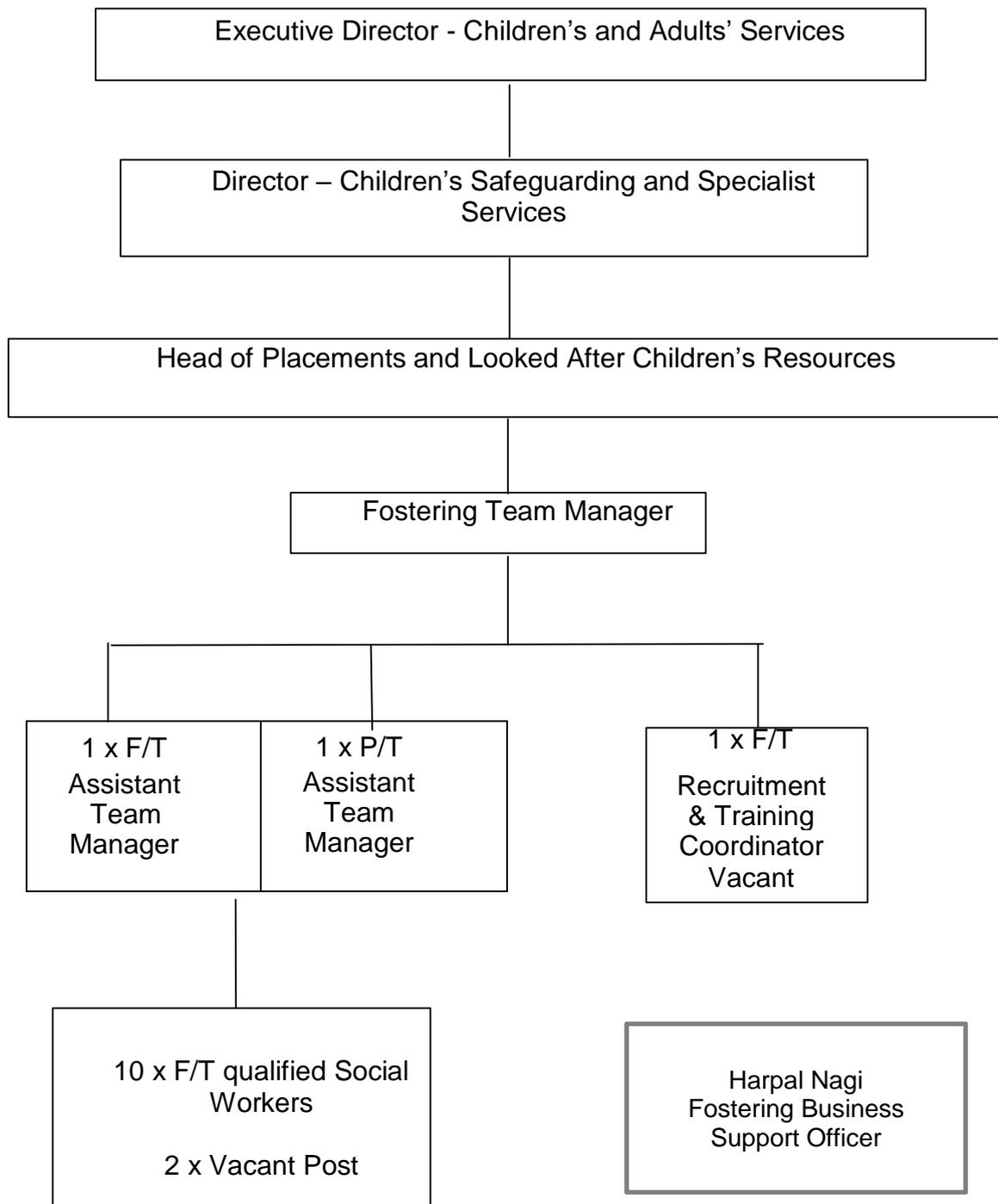
- 1.1 This Statement of Purpose relates to the fostering service provided by the London Borough of Hounslow Family Placements Team, under the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. This Statement of Purpose will be periodically revised to reflect any developments within the service and will be subject to a review on at least an annual basis.
- 1.2 A copy of this Statement of Purpose will be provided to Ofsted and will be available to:
1. All staff working for the fostering Service
 2. All staff involved with the welfare of children looked after within the auspices of the Fostering Service
 3. Any child or young person living with foster carers
 4. Any parent or significant other of a child or young person placed with foster carers
 5. Members of the public
- 1.3 The London Borough of Hounslow as the Fostering Service Provider will ensure that the service is always conducted in a manner that is consistent with this statement.

2. Overall Aims & Objectives of the Fostering Service

- 2.1 To provide a safe and secure family environment for children and young people looked after by the London Borough of Hounslow, where each child will be supported and encouraged to achieve their full potential.
- 2.2 Wherever possible, the Fostering Service will carefully plan and match short term - respite and long-term placements for Hounslow's looked after children. Pre-placement planning meetings will also be held as part of the long-term matching process.
- 2.3 All foster placements must meet the identified emotional and physical needs of the individual child and young person. These developmental needs will include their racial, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, dietary and any other specific need.
- 2.4 Wherever appropriate, the Fostering Service will seek to identify placements that will enable siblings to be placed together.
- 2.5 Wherever practicable, the Fostering Service will seek to avoid multiple placement moves for children and young people.
- 2.6 Wherever practicable, the Fostering Service will seek to identify placements that can accommodate contact (where appropriate) with relatives and significant others in the child's and young person's network.
- 2.7 Consideration will be given to the child and young person's educational needs when deciding upon placements, and every effort will be made to ensure that wherever possible the child or young person can remain in their current educational placement.
- 2.8 The Fostering Service will consider placements for all looked after children and young people giving due regard to their identified needs and their wishes and feelings.
- 2.9 The Fostering Service will actively work in partnership with children, young people, their family, and other relevant professionals/ agencies involved in promoting positive outcomes for children looked after by the London Borough of Hounslow.

3. Management Structure

3.1 The Fostering Service is part of Hounslow's Children's and Adults' Services within the Social Care Division. The structure of the service is shown below.



- 3.2 The Head of Placements and Looked After Children's Resources has overall management responsibility for the Fostering Service. The Fostering Service is managed by the Fostering Team Manager, who manages a team of Social Workers, Recruitment and Training workers.
- 3.3 The Placements Service has its own dedicated Manager, one Social Worker/Placement Officer, two Placements Officers, one Information and Finance Officer, one Allowance Officer, One Resource Coordinator and Regulated Immigration Advisor, three Business Support Officers and one Safety Manager.
- 3.4 The Fostering Service, as detailed above, comprises of three distinct functions and roles within the wider placement service. Each of the three distinct functions aims to work together to ensure the provision of a wide range of placements, providing for placement choice via in-house resources, and through private and voluntary providers.
- 3.5 The Fostering Service works in partnership with the Safeguarding and Support Teams, Intake and Support Teams, Through Care Team, Late Entry Team, Leaving Care Team, The Virtual College, Social Work Team for Children with a Disability, the West Middlesex University Hospital Social Work Team, and Adoption and Permanence Team to ensure all children and young people looked after are safely and appropriately placed.
- 3.6 The Fostering Service aims to work with birth families, and other professionals within and outside the council, to achieve the best possible outcomes for looked after children and young people in Hounslow.
- 3.7 The Fostering Service works in a child centred, multi-disciplinary and anti-discriminatory manner.
- 3.8 The Fostering Service arrange, supervise and support short-term, long-term, respite and staying put placements with in-house foster carers.

4. Placements and LAC Resources Team

- 4.1 The Placements and LAC Resources Service provides a one-stop referral/access point for all children and young people's placement sourcing. The Placements and LAC Resources Service provides a consistent and cohesive approach to placement planning and enables the best use of in-house and commissioned services. The Placements and LAC Resources Service ensures that principles of best value are applied to the procurement of services from the private and voluntary sector. Sourcing of placements for Independent Fostering Agencies & Private and Voluntary Residential Services are done in the Care Place portal. Care Place acts as the primary public-facing advice and information portal to meet the requirements of the Care Act.
- 4.2 The Placements and LAC Resources Service processes all referrals for the placement of looked after children and young people. Placements are sought from a wide range of agencies that include:
- In-house Fostering Service
 - In-house Residential Service
 - Independent Fostering Agencies
 - Private and Voluntary Residential Services
 - Residential Family Assessment Centres
 - Mother and Baby Assessment Centres
 - Secure Accommodation Provision
- 4.3 The Placements and LAC Resources Service undertakes accreditation of identified external provision under the terms of the London Care Council and West London Alliance. Representatives of the Placements Service play an active role within both the London Care Council and West London Alliance, ensuring Hounslow are able to take full advantage of the knowledge and information that these consortiums maintain on external providers.
- 4.4 Representatives of the Placements and LAC Resources Service attend Hounslow's Children and Families' weekly 'Access to Resources Panel' (ARP), ensuring that all placement referrals have

been accessed appropriately and identified placements meet individual need.

- 4.5 The Placements and LAC Resources Service ensures that complaints/concerns regarding external providers are appropriately investigated by the relevant Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), and information is passed on a need to know basis to Ofsted.
- 4.6 The Placements and LAC Resources Service operates a duty service from 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday. The service responds to requests for placements as per 4.2 above.
- 4.7 The Placements and LAC Resources Service is responsible for identifying appropriate placements, obtaining statutory and regulatory checks, negotiating placement costs, and ensuring associated contracts reflect the agreed package of care.
- 4.8 The Placements and LAC Resources Service maintains and provides information on the availability of in-house placements and approved and accredited external resources.
- 4.9 All referrals for Regulation 24 (of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010) assessments are processed by the Adoption and Permanence Team following receipt of an appropriately compiled suitability report submitted by the relevant social work teams.
- 4.10 Placements and LAC Resources Service is committed to providing high quality services and support to young people aged 16+ years who are preparing to live independently and who are looked after and who have been looked after. We aim to provide support, encouragement and continuity of care and contact in order to maximise life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health and social care and to ensure young people leaving care are enabled to live successful adult lives.
- 4.11 Placements and LAC Resource Team provides support surrounding immigration, there is an Officer of Immigration Commissioner regulated immigration advisor on site who provides support to professionals in all teams and young people to resolve immigration matters at the earliest stage possible, preventing an uncertain future for young people in adulthood.

- 4.12 The Team provides an immigration checking service to ensure service users are not excluded from local authority support under Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 4.13 An income is generated for the Late Entry Team and Leaving Team from unaccompanied minors and post 18 unaccompanied minors via appropriate Home Office grant claims.
- 4.14 The Team has a lead officer on NRPF Connect, a software interfaced with the Home Office which allows continuing immigration checks with a view to expediting outstanding immigration issues. Reports including financial expenditure is extracted to highlight costs to the Local Authority.
- 4.15 Immigration training and inductions for professionals are carried out to ensure that they are aware of some of the issues that a child or young person may have.
- 4.16 Provides administration support to the Late Entry Team for new referrals of unaccompanied minors.
- 4.17 A support service in the form of a maintenance person, is provided to lead young people to independence by teaching them health and safety alongside simple D.I.Y. tasks. This is done via the Children in Care Council.
- 4.18 If a young person is allocated a property via Quota Panel they are accompanied to view it to ensure that there are no existing health and safety issues present.
- 4.19 When a young person is allocated more permanent housing they are guided and supported on how to decorate and obtain items to make it their home.

5. Recruitment & Training

The recruitment and training function of the Fostering Service undertakes all publicity and marketing to recruit in-house foster carers for the London Borough of Hounslow. The training aspect of the Fostering Service is responsible for providing the relevant support and training for approved foster carers in order to help meet their learning and developmental needs; as well as develop their practice in order that foster carers can help transform the lives of looked after children.

Services Provided

- 5.1 The team aims to recruit the number of new foster carers identified in the annual recruitment strategy, who can meet the diverse needs of Hounslow's children and young people.
- 5.2 Recruitment outcomes are linked to the implementation of the annual recruitment marketing strategy, employing a variety of marketing methods.
- 5.3 The recruitment targets will be based on the projected placement needs of looked after children in Hounslow. Targets will be set in accordance with any identified gaps in the Fostering Service profile, in comparison to Hounslow's looked after children and young people's population in terms of age, sibling groups, race, culture, ethnicity, religion and language.

Assessment & Approval of Foster Carers

- 5.4 The Fostering Service will make use of a competency-based approach in all the stages of assessment and approval of foster carers.
- 5.5 The Fostering Service endorses the Fostering Network Code of Practice, as well as utilising common standard tools such as the, Fostering Network's assessment tools or CoramBAAF forms/draft letters. By using the Fostering Network's and the Coram BAAF tools the fostering agencies are more likely to achieve uniform standards. Therefore, the Fostering Services identify the above tools as appropriate in the assessment and approval stages of fostering applications for the London Borough of Hounslow.

5.6 The Fostering Service promotes the following values underpinning the competency-based approach that are an integral part of the assessment process:

- Safeguarding children's welfare is paramount
- Individuals are respected
- Difference and diversity is valued
- Equality is promoted
- Discrimination is challenged
- Confidentiality is maintained on a need-to-know basis
- Advice and feedback is provided in a constructive way
- Applicants are enabled to demonstrate their competence
- Standards of childcare are explicit and agreed

Criteria for Selection of Foster Families

5.7 All prospective foster carers will be rigorously assessed prior to approval to foster for Hounslow. In addition to meeting the statutory legislative requirements of the Children Act 1989, and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, prospective foster families will be expected to meet the following selection criteria:

- To have a spare bedroom except where only fostering babies between the ages of 0-2 years. In the case of kinship carers, Regulation 24 (of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010) bedroom sharing between the carer's own child and the foster child may be permitted following a risk assessment

- To have a satisfactory social services record

- To have satisfactory police record as evidenced by an enhanced DBS check

- To have a satisfactory medical report from a GP

- If living with a spouse/partner, the relationship should be established and secure

- To have a satisfactory community support network

- To have an ability to communicate effectively with adults and children, by telephone, in writing and verbally

To have an ability to use a computer to write word documents and to access emails

To have the ability to be flexible and accept necessary change

To have a non-judgemental attitude

To accept that many looked after children have suffered significant harm, and to work positively where necessary with their family

To have the commitment to attend training events and support groups

To have an ability to use training opportunities and assimilate training information to continuously improve their childcare knowledge and skills

To adhere to the boundaries of confidentiality on a need-to-know basis

To agree that it is inappropriate to hit, shake, push, slap or smack a foster child, deprive a child of food or drink as a sanction, use verbal abuse, restrict or refuse visits/ communication with social workers, ask a child to wear distinctive or inappropriate clothing, or lock a child in a room as a sanction

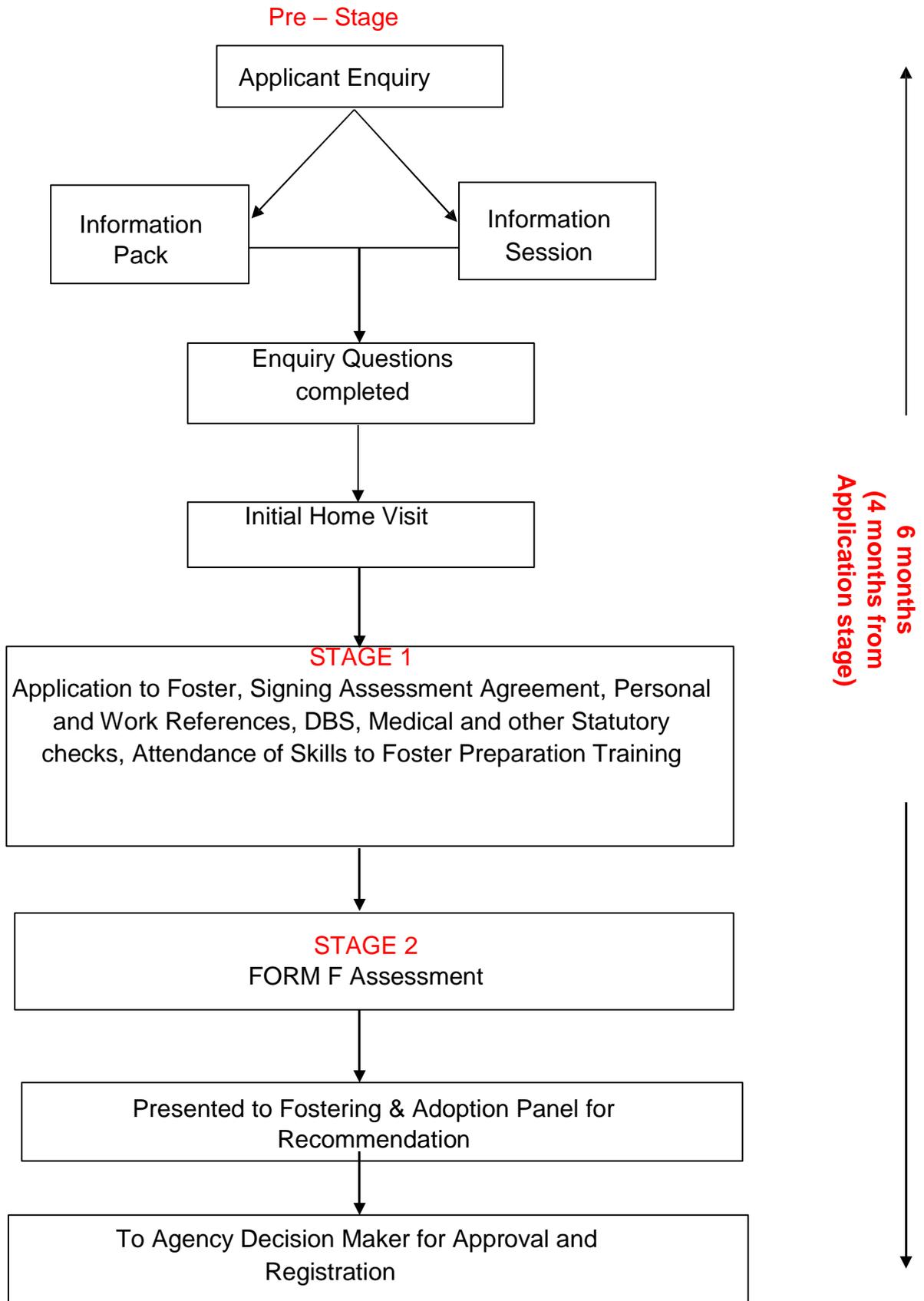
To have a willingness to support a child/young person's attendance for educational needs and medical/therapeutic appointments including the provision of transport where necessary

To have a willingness to support a child to achieve his/her potential in education

To have a willingness/ability to provide for a child's race, cultural, ethnic religious and dietary needs

To promote contact, where appropriate, with the birth family/significant others, including the provision of transport to contact venues

5.8 Foster Carer Recruitment, Assessment & Approval Process Flowchart



Recruitment Assessment Process

5.9 Applicant Enquiry:

All interested applicants who contact the Fostering Service via the free phone telephone number will be able to speak to a member of our recruitment staff. Applicants are also able to complete an online enquiry form via Hounslow's website. A fostering information pack is sent to all interested enquiries within 48 hours.

5.10 Enquiry Questions:

Applicants will answer short enquiry stage questions with a member of our recruitment staff over the telephone. The answers to the enquiry stage questions are then discussed with the Assistant Team Manager to decide if an initial visit should take place with the applicant.

5.11 Initial Home Visit:

A social worker will visit the applicant at their home. During this visit, applicants will be provided with further information about the fostering role, and the roles/responsibilities of the Fostering Service staff. Information will also be given about the Skills to Foster preparation training and the assessment process. The fostering tasks and impact on family will be discussed with the applicant in more detail. The need for all members of the household to consent to statutory checks and information on these checks will be explained. In addition, Hounslow's requirements in terms of health and safety standards will be explained in case the application cannot proceed because certain essential criteria are not fulfilled.

The purpose of the visit is to establish the applicant's commitment to fostering and fostering tasks, and to look at their suitability and the suitability of their home.

Following this initial home visit, applicants will be given feedback, which will be recorded on file. A decision will be made as to whether to proceed further with the application or not. If the decision is to not proceed further, then a letter will be sent to the applicants explaining reasons for this decision. Alternatively, if the decision is to progress the application further then an application form is sent out to the applicant.

5.12 Stage 1

Stage 1 starts when the Fostering Services receives that applicants completed application form. The applicant will be required to attend a 'Skills to Foster' preparation training as provided by the Fostering Team. Recruitment social workers facilitate these training sessions with the help of experienced foster carers and young people who have previously been in the care of the local authority. A number of key topics are covered in the training including the role of foster carers, promoting cultural identity and life chances, the challenges and rewards of fostering, child development, safer caring, and moving children on to their new placement or returning to live with their birth family or relative.

During this stage statutory checks including Disclosure and Barring Service, NSPCC, Medical, Employment and Local Authority checks including pre-historic checks, prior to the new ICT infrastructure are carried out. 6 personal references will also be sought including previous partner's reference (if applicable). It is important to note that Disclosure and Barring Service checks will be completed all birth children living at home.

Once the applicant's checks and information have been received. The applicant will be informed of the decision to proceed to Stage 2 within 10 working days. If during Stage 1 Hounslow decides not to proceed with the assessment, Hounslow will write to the applicant informing them of our decision and the reasons for this. During this stage the applicant has no right to a review of this decision by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or to make a representation to the Fostering Service.

5.13 Stage 2

In stage 2 the assessment process starts. During the assessment, the applicant will be allocated a recruitment social worker who will visit them between 6-8 times to complete a comprehensive assessment form. For joint applicants, each applicant will be seen at least once by themselves. A health and safety and equipment assessment is also carried out. For families who live in private rented accommodation, an agreement in writing from the landlord is required. Applicants will be given some written work to complete between visits to add to the assessment. During the assessment a Form assessment will be compiled.

Towards the end of the prospective carers journey, they will be required to attend a Fostering Panel. The Fostering Panel is made up of 8-10 independent and professional members who evaluate the fostering assessment report and make a decision whether to

recommend applicants as foster carers. The recruitment social worker will also accompany the prospective applicants to the panel.

If the application is successful, the panel will also make a recommendation as to the age and number of children the approved foster may be suited for caring, as well as the type of Fostering e.g. short term or long term.

It takes about four to six months to go the assessment and approval process to become a foster carer.

6. Ongoing Training for Foster Carers

- 6.1 The Recruitment and Training team is responsible for drawing together the annual training plan for Hounslow's foster carers.
- 6.2 The training plan will be developed by identifying core training skills, and targeting training needs as identified from foster carer annual reviews and in compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.
- 6.3 The aim of ongoing training is to ensure that foster carers' knowledge and skills are developed to maintain high standards of childcare, and to keep carers up to date with new developments with regards to meeting the needs of looked after children.
- 6.4 The Fostering Service, where ever appropriate, will provide advanced specialists training courses for foster carers who are particularly looking after children with complex needs.
- 6.5 All Hounslow foster carers are issued with a Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) pack for foster carers, which they are required to complete within twelve months of approval, with the help of their supervising social worker. Training and support groups have been provided for all foster carers in relation to completing the TSDS.
- 6.6 Foster carers are given mandatory training to complete and a variety of recommended courses to support their professional development. Training is held at venues in and around the borough. In addition to this, a variety of online training courses are offered to enhance knowledge and skills.
- 6.7 Hounslow Council and other neighbouring London boroughs (including Hillingdon, Harrow, Brent, Ealing and Tri-borough) are now working within the West London Alliance on a collaborative post-approval training programme for foster carers. This will complement the individual regional training programmes. This approach will expand the training opportunities available to foster carers to enhance their learning and development opportunities.
- 6.8 Foster carers are also offered further free class room based and online training in Hounslow by the Hounslow Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB). They receive a regular training schedule from HSCB and are encouraged to apply for training that is relevant to their development needs.

7. Fostering Support Service

- 7.1 The Fostering Service provides support and supervision of all placements of children with Hounslow's short-term, long-term and private foster carers.
- 7.2 The aims and objectives of the Fostering Service are to ensure that all foster carers are providing care that safeguards and protects children within guidelines set down by statute and the department.
- 7.3 The Fostering Service will ensure that opportunities are provided to foster carers to gain all the necessary skills, knowledge, information and advice, in order to meet the needs of the individual children in their care.

Roles & Responsibilities

- 7.4 The Supervising Social Worker will:

Undertake regular (4 - 6 weekly) supervisory visits to the foster carer's home and make telephone contact in between visits

Undertake at least one unannounced visit to the foster placement each year

Ensure information held on foster carers is up to date and includes current statutory checks, composition of the household and foster carer reviews

Ensure that all foster carers receive up to date policies and procedures to include compliance with guidelines set out in the Foster Carers Handbook

Ensure that each looked after child receives an age appropriate Children's guide pack

Ensure that any concerns about the care of children are addressed and standards of care/child protection procedures are followed when allegations and serious complaints are made

Ensure home visits are purposeful with an agreed agenda compiled by the supervising social worker and foster carer, recorded, and actions agreed and monitored in following visits

Ensure home visits include an element of inspection of the home environment and standard of care offered to the child

Monitor the foster carers' training and support needs, with mutually agreed objectives for the year. London Borough of Hounslow require carers to undertake a minimum of 3 training courses a year

Undertake the foster carer annual review providing an opportunity to formally appraise the carer and plan for the carer's ongoing training and development needs

Ensure that foster carers' training profiles are kept up to date and certificates are received by working in partnership with the Recruitment and Training Team.

Maintain the foster carer's electronic record, which should include records of supervisory visits updated three-month summary records, standards of care, annual reviews, personal education plans and TSDS portfolios.

Ensure information about the looked after child is stored securely by the foster carer. This will be regularly inspected by the supervising social worker

Ensure that the carer has all the appropriate LAC forms, and that the Placement Planning Meeting is held within the required timescales

Ensure the Placements Service has all the necessary information about carers to inform the decision making/matching process, and to maintain optimum placement functioning

Maintain the welfare and development of the child in placement and keep up to date with the progress of the child's care plan

Ensure that the placement continues to meet the child's needs and that any difficulty that the foster carer has in meeting the child's needs is addressed

Communicate regularly with the child's social worker, and other professionals

Undertake joint visits with the child's social worker as necessary

Attend statutory review meetings with the foster carer and to support the foster carer in making a purposeful contribution to such meetings verbally, or if unable to attend with written reports

Ensure foster carer's approval is annually reviewed, and first year annual reviews are presented to the Fostering & Adoption Panel. The supervising social worker compiles a review report following consultation with the foster carer, child's social worker, Looked after Child (over the age of five), Independent Reviewing Officer and where appropriate, the Therapeutic Services and the child's birth parents. Each foster carer's annual review is chaired by a manager from the Fostering Service or an Independent Reviewing Officer

Ensure any proposed change to the existing approval range, or Standards of Care reports are presented to the Fostering & Adoption Panel, and the foster carers are invited to attend

7.5 Therapeutic adviser

As part of the Foster Carers Support and Retention package a Therapeutic Adviser's post has been developed. This unique support resource for Hounslow's foster carers.

Its aims are:

- to assist and support foster carers when caring for children and young people
- to prevent placement breakdown and reduce the number of moves experienced by children/young people
- to reduce the number of IFA placements

- to promote positive parenting skills
- to provide support and guidance tailored to the specific needs of the placement
- to assist and provide support to foster carers during the transition period of children moving to permanency/adoption
- to assist in the training of foster carers
- to offer consultation with other professionals working with foster carers
- to work in partnership with carers to safeguard and promote the child's welfare
- to promote the health and wellbeing of children/young people looked after
- to work with carers to promote the identity, cultural and religious needs of children/young people in their care

This support for carers is in addition to the support provided by their supervising social worker and is accessed via a referral system and further consultation between the supervising social worker and the Fostering Team Manger.

The therapeutic sessions have been put in place so that the therapeutic work can focus on areas such as building a secure and positive relationship, managing challenging behaviours, play and communication, positive parenting and support, assisting transitions for children and young people to permanency or independent living, dealing with separation and loss and attachment, through to individual counselling for carers.

Each case is evaluated and monitored individually and these evaluations are ongoing throughout the support as well as at the end of the agreed sessions. This ensures the optimum support is being made available to help retain foster carers, while developing their confidence, skills and abilities in their role.

8. SUMMARY OF FOSTER CARER RESPONSIBILITIES

8.1 To be responsible for the care in one's own home of a child or children placed by Hounslow and to work with the Fostering Service and all those involved in helping looked after children fulfil their potential.

8.2 Specific Responsibilities **Caring for children**

To provide day-to-day care of the children being looked after

To have regard to the particular needs of children separated from their families

To take part in implementing the childcare plan, which could include specific tasks such as promoting contact with parents and others who are important to the child

To promote the healthy growth and development of the child or children, with particular emphasis on health and on educational achievement

To ensure that the children being looked after are encouraged to develop a positive understanding of their heritage, religion and culture

Where appropriate, to assist and support parents and other people who are significant in a child's life, to sustain and develop positive relations with him or her

To enable children and young people who are moving on, to do so in a planned, positive and meaningful manner

To enable children and young people to attend and engage in leisure activities and pursue interests and hobbies in order to promote a healthy lifestyle

To support children and young people to have a voice through engaging with LAC Participation Services and CoramVoice

Providing a safe and caring environment

To ensure that children are kept safe from harm and abuse and that they are taught how to seek help should they have any worries about anything

To promote the secure attachment of children to adults capable of providing safe and effective care

To act as an advocate for each child

To ensure children in their care use the internet and social media sites safely and carers will receive training to make sure this is undertaken effectively

Working as part of a team

To be part of the Fostering Service and to work with other departmental staff and professionals within service guidelines, policies, and procedures

To attend and actively participate in all reviews, family meetings, case conferences and court hearings as required, and to keep written records of placements and contribute to reports

To take up appropriate training opportunities and recognise the benefit of continued training

To deal with confidential information in a responsible manner

8.3 COMPETENCIES NEEDED FOR FOSTER CARE

Caring for children

An ability to provide a good standard of care to other people's children, which promotes emotional, physical and sexual development as well as attending to their health and leisure needs and supporting educational achievement

An ability to work closely with children's families, and others who are important to the child

An ability to set appropriate and consistent boundaries, and manage children's behaviour within these, without the use of physical or other inappropriate punishment

Knowledge of child development and an ability to listen to and communicate with children appropriate to their age and level of understanding

Providing a safe and caring environment

An ability to ensure that children are cared for in a home where they are safe from harm or abuse

An ability to help children keep themselves safe from harm or abuse and to know how to seek help if their safety or welfare is at risk

Working as part of a team

To work as part of the Fostering Service along with other professionals as part of the team around the child, and contribute to the departmental planning for the child/young person

An ability to communicate effectively

An ability to keep information confidential on a need to know basis

An ability to promote equality, diversity and rights of individuals and to appropriately challenge any expression of discrimination or prejudice whatever its basis

To attend and actively participate in all reviews, family meetings, case conferences and court hearings as required, and to keep written records of placements and contribute to reports

Own development

An ability to appreciate how personal experiences have affected carers and their families, and the impact fostering is likely to have on the carers and their own families

An ability to have people and links within the community which provide support

An ability to use training opportunities and to improve knowledge and skills

An ability to sustain positive relationships and maintain effective functioning through periods of stress

9. Principles of the Fostering Service

To ensure staff are adequately trained and competent in delivering a quality Fostering Service

There are clear lines of accountability and effective management of the service

All staff and carers have a valid enhanced DBS check which is satisfactory

The service operates within the framework of equal opportunities

The service recognises and values the diverse nature of the community it serves

All children are encouraged to reach their full potential socially and educationally

All placements are monitored and supervised

Staff and carers receive support and supervision

The health, educational and social needs of children are met within placements

Allegations against carers/staff will be investigated following departmental procedures

Systems are in place to monitor the department's needs for placements. This information is to be used to inform recruitment and contracting with providers

All foster placements provide a safe secure environment for children placed

The Fostering Service will carefully plan and match short term - respite and long term placements for Hounslow's looked after children. Pre-placement planning meetings will also be held as part of the long-term matching process.

Life skills and opportunities are made available to all children appropriate to their age and developmental needs

The Fostering Service is committed to meeting and enhancing the learning and developmental needs of staff and carers

The Fostering Service has a clear strategy for the support of foster carers ensuring each foster carer has access to a supervising social worker

The Fostering Service ensures that there are comprehensive and up to date records on all children placed and all foster carers maintain placement records. This information is accessible in line with data protection regulations

The Fostering Service has clear administrative records and financial management systems pertinent to the running of the service

The Fostering Service operates a Fostering and Adoption Panel that provides a quality assurance role with regards to the recruitment and review of foster carers and foster placements. The panel will ensure that the welfare and safety of children is paramount in all decision making

The Fostering Service will ensure there is a range of safe and appropriate placements for children looked after by the London Borough of Hounslow

The Fostering Service will work in accordance to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (“GDPR”) 2018. Together with Hounslow Children’s Services’ Private notice and the foster carers agreement the specifics below relate to how the Hounslow Fostering Team will use/share and store foster carers information when:

- Making placements
- Completing or amending any assessment reports
- Communicating with training providers and any other relevant activities including Foster Carer Recruitment and Marketing activities
- Sharing information with other social work teams and relevant professionals.

10. Standards of Care

All children are entitled to live in a safe and secure environment

Carers are given guidance on the use of restraint and corporal punishment

Children will be matched with carers who are able to meet their identified racial, cultural, religious, social, emotional and developmental needs

It is an expectation that all children will have their health, leisure and educational needs met

Allegations and complaints against carers and staff will be investigated following the departmental procedures

All carers will receive core training in respect of departmental policies and procedures

Where issues relating to the standards of care arise in a placement the Fostering & Adoption Panel will act as a quality assurance mechanism and where necessary consider the ongoing approval of carers

Procedures will be followed in seeking exemptions and extensions to approval terms

Children will receive written information about fostering

Children's wishes, feelings and views about their placements will be sought regularly and formally as part of the foster carers' annual review process

Views of other professionals will be sought in respect of placements as part of the reviewing process

All foster carers will receive a copy of the Foster Carers Handbook and subsequent amendments as and when issued

The Hounslow Pledge is outlined in the Young Person's Hounslow Website. The link for this is www.younghounslow.info/. The Hounslow Pledge is located in the Children in Care section of the website

11. Establishment of Foster Carers

The following information was established as at 24/02/2020

Establishment of Foster Carers

Approved Short-term & Long-term Foster Homes	66
Approved Short Term Foster Homes	36
Respite Homes (including short-term and respite AND short-term, long-term and respite)	10
Total Number of Approved Households	112

Number of Approved In House Foster Carers = 177

Total Number of Approved Male Carers	68
Total Number of Approved Female Carers	109

Breakdown of Age Range of Foster Carers

Age Range	Female Carers	Male Carers
29 and Under	0	0
30 – 39	8	5
40 – 49	22	8
50 – 59	43	22
60 – 69	33	24
70+	4	8
	110	67

$$(110 + 67 = 177)$$

Ethnicity breakdown of Foster Carers:

Ethnicity	Female	Male
White British (A1)	43	31
White Irish (A2)	5	1
Any Other White Background (A3)	5	2
White & Black Caribbean (B1)	1	0
White & Black African (B2)	2	0
White Asian (B3)	0	0
Any Other Mixed Background (B4)	2	0
Indian (C1)	12	6
Pakistani (C2)	10	9
Bangladeshi (C3)	0	0
Any Other Asian	2	2
Black Caribbean (D1)	5	2
Black African (D2)	22	13
Any Other Black	0	0
Chinese (E1)	0	0
Any Other Ethnic Group	1	1
	110	67

(110 + 67 = 177)

Number of Staying Put Arrangements: 20

Registrations/De-registrations of Foster Carer households from 1st April 2019 to as at 24/02/2020

Number of Approvals: **4**

Number of De-registrations/Resignations: **2**

An up to date information report on the population of children in care according to age, gender and ethnicity is available from the Fostering Service

12. Complaints, Allegations and Standards of Care

- 12.1 Each issue is investigated by staff within the Fostering Service, details and outcomes of which are recorded in LCS under the carers record. Information is also recorded on an in-house data base, available for inspection.
- 12.2 Any complaints in the first instance should be brought to the attention of a staff member and their line management. The complaint should be acknowledged in writing by either the staff member receiving the complaint or the line manager. Complaints received by senior managers should be acknowledged and passed to the line manager of the relevant service. Complaints passed to the Director by Members on behalf of the person making the complaint will also be acknowledged and follow the procedure in the normal way.

For complaints and representations procedure, please refer to Appendix 1 in this document.

- 12.3 Any complaints, allegations and standards of care issues regarding our service should be made in writing to:

Fostering Team Manager
Fostering Team 4th Floor
7 Bath Road
Hounslow
TW3 3EB
Telephone: 020 8583 3426
Email: Fostering.Duty@hounslow.gov.uk

13. Key Personnel of the Fostering Service

The management and social work staff in the fostering team all have a background of significant relevant experience in children and families as well as fostering and adoption work.

Head of Placements & LAC Resources:	Bob Spencer BSc Experimental Psychology, MSW, CQSW
Registered Team Manager:	Sonia Mark BA Social Work Post Qualifying Award in Social Work and Practice Teacher Award
Assistant Team Manager:	Gurinder Kaur M.Soc.Sc, CQSW
Assistant Team Manager:	Vacant
Fostering Recruitment & Training:	Vacant
Advanced Social Worker Practitioner:	Gilbert Ansa-Otu BA Social Work (Sociology)
Senior Supervising Social Worker:	Priti Bharatey MSW Social Work, MBA
Senior Supervising Social Worker:	Christianah Jayeola BA Hons Interprofessional Learning (Social Work)
Supervising Social Worker:	Claire Goodhead B.Sc. Social Work
Senior Supervising Social Worker:	Kimi Penttinen MSW, M.A. (Sociology)
Recruitment / Supervising Social Worker:	Hayley Benton MSc Social Work
Senior Recruitment Supervising Social Worker:	Kiran Randhawa BA Social Work
Supervising Social Worker:	Tolulope Oligbinde Social Work
Senior Recruitment Supervising Social Worker:	Praveen Varghese MSW Social Work
Fostering Team Administrator:	Harpal Nagi Diploma in Secretarial Studies
Fostering Panel Administrator:	Lee Redfern
Children's Placements Information Officer:	Franklyn Wellington AMIAS
Allowance Officer:	Surila Nera
Finance and Admin Manager:	Polly Dhinsay
Placements Officer:	Donna Pusey Dip SW, BA Hons, Applied Social Studies
Placements Officer:	Paramjit Chana
Resource Coordinator/ Regulated Immigration Advisor:	Catherine Treharne- Evans

18. Useful Contacts

Essential Addresses and Contact Details

The Fostering Team Manager

Hounslow House

6 Bath Road

Hounslow

TW3 3EB

Office Telephone Number: 0208 583 3426

Fostering Recruitment Freephone number: 0800 731 8558

Email: Fostering@hounslow.gov.uk

The Manager Hounslow's Customer Relations Team

London Borough of Hounslow

Hounslow House

6 Bath Road

Hounslow

TW3 3EB

Telephone number: 020 8583 52113

Director of Children's Safeguarding and Specialist Services

London Borough of Hounslow

Hounslow House

6 Bath Road

Hounslow

TW3 3EB

Tel: 020 8583 3002

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 ZWD

Telephone number: 0300 1231231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

The Fostering Network

87 Blackfriars Road

London

SE1 8HA

Telephone number: 0207 620 6400

Email: info@fostering.net

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Telephone number: 0300 061 0614

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

The Independent Review Mechanism

Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park

Royds Hall Road

Wortley, Leeds LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0113 202 2080 or 0845 450 3956

Website: www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

APPENDIX 1

Complaints Procedure into document July 2018

**Childrens Social Care
Statutory Complaints Process
July 2018**



**London Borough
of Hounslow**

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1. Who may make a Complaint?

A representation or complaint may be made by:

- a. Any child who is a Looked After Child or who, although not Looked After, is a Child in Need;
- b. A parent or person with Parental Responsibility;
- c. A local authority Foster Carer;
- d. Such other person as the authority consider has sufficient interest in a child's welfare to warrant a complaint or representation being considered by them;
- e. An Eligible Young Person, Relevant Young Person or Former Relevant Young Person;
- f. A Qualifying Young Person under the Leaving Care procedures;
- g. A person aged up to 24 who is or was a Former Relevant or Qualifying young person and whom the local authority may still assist in connection with education and training;
- h. Special Guardians;
- i. A child in respect of whom a Special Guardianship Order is in force;
- j. Any person who has applied for an assessment for special guardianship support;
- k. Any child who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;
- l. Any person wishing to adopt a child;
- m. Any person to whom arrangements for the provision of adoption support services extend;
- n. Adopted persons, their adoptive parents, birth parents and former guardians.

This is not an exhaustive list and the Complaints Manager will determine whether complaints from individuals outside the above categories fall within the legal definition.

Where a complaint is made on behalf of a child, the Complaints Manager should confirm, where appropriate, that the child is happy for this to happen and that the complaint submitted reflects the child's views.

The council has the discretion to decide whether or not the representative is suitable to act in this capacity or has sufficient interest in the child's welfare. The Complaints Manager will discuss this decision with the relevant service managers, as appropriate.

2. What May Be Complained About?

A complaint may arise as a result of many things relating to statutory children's social care functions such as :

- An unwelcome or disputed decision;
- Concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service;
- Delay in decision making or provision of services;
- Delivery or non-delivery of services including complaints procedures;
- Quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service;
- Attitude or behaviour of staff;
- Application of eligibility and assessment criteria;
- The impact on a child of the application of a local authority policy;
- Assessment, care management and review.

This is not an exhaustive list and the Complaints Manager should seek legal advice as necessary.

In relation to adoption, a complaint may be about the following:

- The provision of Adoption Support Services insofar as these enable adoptive children to discuss matters relating to adoption;
- Assessments and related decisions for adoption support services;
- Placing children for adoption, including Parental Responsibility and contact issues;
- Removal of children who are or may be placed by adoption agencies;
- Removal of children in non-agency cases;
- The carrying out by the local authority of its duties on receipt of a notice of intention to adopt;
- The carrying out by the local authority of its duties in respect of
 - Considering adoption for a child;
 - A proposed placement of a child with prospective adopters;
 - Adoptive placements and reviews;
 - Adoption Case Records;
 - Contact;

- Parental Responsibility prior to adoption abroad.

In relation to Special Guardianship Order, a complaint may be about the following:

- Financial support for Special Guardians;
- Support groups for children to enable them to discuss matters relating to Special Guardianship;
- Assistance in relation to contact with parents for children;
- Therapeutic services for children;
- Assistance to ensure the continuation of the relationship between the child and their Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian.

The Complaints Manager has discretion in deciding whether to consider complaints where to do so would prejudice any of the following concurrent investigations:

- Court proceedings;
- Tribunals;
- Disciplinary proceedings;
- Criminal proceedings.

If the Complaints Manager decides not to consider or further consider complaints subject to these concurrent investigations, they must write to the complainant explaining the reason for their decision and specifying the relevant concurrent investigation.

Once the concurrent investigation has been concluded the complainant may resubmit their complaint to the local authority as long as it is within one year of the conclusion of the concurrent investigation.

3. Key Principles

When adopting our children complaints procedure, we have adopted a number of key principles:

1. The complaints procedure should be clear and easy to use
2. It should ensure that the people who use the service are treated with dignity and respect, are not afraid to make a complaint and have their concerns taken seriously.
3. It should ensure, as far as is possible, even-handedness in the handling of complaints.

4. It would ensure that any concerns about the protection of the children are referred immediately to the relevant social services team or to the Police.
5. It should make sure that as many complaints as possible are resolved swiftly and satisfactorily at the local level; though that may not mean every complaint is upheld.
6. It should ensure a fair process and adequate support for everyone involved in the complaint
7. It should ensure that the child or young person receives a full response without delay.
8. It should enable any local authority purchasing services in the independent sector, to exercise its continuing duty of care.
9. It should ensure sensible and effective links with other procedures in local government
10. It should safeguard the child or young person's right of access to other means of redress, including the local government ombudsman.
11. It should ensure we are monitoring our performance in handling complaints, deliver what we have promised, learn from complaints and use this learning to improve services for everyone who uses them.

4. Time Limit for Making Complaints

If a complainant does wish to make a complaint, it is best to do so as soon as possible after the incident occurs.

The Council cannot normally accept complaints made more than 12 months after the date the matter occurred or the date the complainant was notified of the matter. However, the Complaints Manager will look at any complaints received after the 12 month time limit on an individual basis and determine whether the Council can investigate the matter.

5. Informing Young people about the Complaints Procedure

Young people must be informed about the Complaints Procedure in a variety of ways suitable to their needs and level of understanding.

Copies of relevant leaflets should be provided, for example by including them in the Young people's Guide which is given to Young people before or upon admission to a children's home. Such information must include an explanation of the role of an

Advocate and provide contact details for advocates to make complaints on young people's behalf.

Where Young people or those acting on their behalf express a wish to make a complaint, they should be given any information or advice they require on how to use the complaints procedure. Their options must be carefully explained including information and advice on alternative methods for resolving their dissatisfaction. For all complaints made by or on behalf of Young people, help must always be offered to obtain the services of an advocate.

Where a young person wishes to make a complaint, s/he should be referred to the Complaints Manager.

If the complaint is made by or relates to a young person in foster care or residential care, it may also be directed to the Regulatory Authority.

6. Receiving Complaints

Complaints may be made orally or in writing, including by email. Some complaints can be received via the Local Government Ombudsman, if the complainant approaches the Ombudsman before completing the Council's complaints process.

All comments, complaints and compliments about services to children should be forwarded to the Complaints Manager to record and these will all be recorded on our system: Respond.

In relation to complaints, the emphasis should be on a quick resolution reached locally wherever possible.

However, where a complaint includes an allegation of Significant Harm, the matter must be directed to be dealt with under the Child Protection Procedures and must be referred to the Referral and Assessment Team for this purpose immediately.

Staff should not deal with complaints relating to their own practice and must pass such matters to their own manager; guidance should be sought from the Complaints Manager, as appropriate.

7. Timescales

The timescales in working days for the overall complaints process are:

- Acknowledge receipt of complaint within 2 working days
- 10 working days at Stage 1 (with a further 10 working days for more complex complaints or additional time if an advocate is required).

- 25 working days at Stage 2 (with a maximum extension to 65 working days)
- 20 working days for the complainant to request a Review Panel
- 30 working days to convene and hold the Review Panel at Stage 3
- 5 working days for the Panel to issue its findings; and
- 15 working days for the Council to respond to the findings.

8. Providing Advocacy and Support

During the course of making a complaint, the council can support the child or young person by actively providing information and advice. This can be through an advocate and in Hounslow we use Action for Children.

The Complaints Manager should ensure that a suitable person meets the child or young person to discuss the complaints process and ensure that any questions or concerns that the complainant may have are fully captured and addressed.

Where an advocate is being used, the Council will ensure that the advocate is acting with the informed consent of the young person. The Council uses Action for Children and the Council will ensure the young person understands the complaints procedure. It is not to be assumed that the advocate will explain this.

We will also ensure that, when required, we will offer translation and interpretation services to those who are complaining whose first language is not English.

9. Stage One - Local Resolution

If comments made by users about a service indicate dissatisfaction with the service, the front-line service provider or the line manager receiving the complaint should in most instances try to resolve it quickly, where possible.

Any complaints received directly by the service must be brought to the attention of the Customer Relations Team for logging and acknowledgement.

In most cases, complainants will contact the Customer Relations Team directly if they wish to make a formal complaint. However, sometimes they may send a complaint directly to the service. In all cases where formal complaints are received, the Statutory Complaints Manager must be sent a copy of the complaint immediately.

Formal complaints will be considered under Stage 1 of the complaints process and the Statutory Complaints Manager will aim to:

- a. Send an acknowledgement to the complainant within 2 working days of receipt, notifying the complainant of who will be dealing with their complaint

and when they can expect to receive a response. If the complaint is from a young person, the Statutory Complaints Manager may also establish at this point whether the young person requires an advocate;

- b. Assign the complaint to the appropriate Service Manager to investigate and respond within 10 working days;

If it is not possible to respond within 10 working days, e.g. where files or records need to be checked or a key member of staff is not available, the Service Manager must inform the Customer Relations Team who will send a holding letter to advise the complainant of the delay. The maximum period for a complaint to remain at Stage 1 is 10 working days (or up to 20 working days in prescribed circumstances).

The manager for each team or service has to keep a record of complaints dealt with 'locally' and their outcomes. This record should then be forwarded to the Complaints Manager.

If the matter cannot be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction within the timescale, the complainant has the right to progress their complaint to Stage Two of the statutory complaints process and given assistance to do so as necessary. The complainant may, however, agree to extend the deadline for the Stage One process.

10. Stage Two - Investigation

Complainants should be encouraged to make a written complaint however a complaint may be accepted in any form. If a complaint has been submitted orally, the Statutory Complaints Manager must ensure that the details of the complaint and the complainants' desired outcome are recorded in writing and agreed with the complainant. Once the Stage Two complaint is received, an Investigating Officer (IO) and Independent Person (IP) will be appointed by the Customer Relations Team to investigate the complaint. Details on roles are at Appendix 1.

The Independent Person is appointed to shadow the Investigating Officer. Under the arrangement, the Independent Person accompanies the Investigating Officer throughout the investigation. The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will arrange to meet with the complainant and agree a Statement of Complaint. Once the Statement of Complaint has been agreed by the complainant, the Stage Two process commences.

Action on Receipt of a Stage Two Complaint

Upon receiving a complaint, the Complaints Manager will:

1. Record the complaint. At this stage the Complaints Manager will decide whether the complaint should be investigated under this procedure or whether it should be referred elsewhere;
2. Ensure that a copy of the complaint is sent to any staff member named in it and to that person's line manager, unless to do so would prejudice the investigation of the complaint in which case the Complaints Manager should inform the relevant senior manager of this decision;
3. Appoint and send terms of reference to the Investigating Officer and the Independent for the investigation;
4. Acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 2 working days and advise the complainant of how the complaint is being dealt with under the Stage Two process, the timescales and the name of the Investigating Officer.

The Complaints Manager and the Investigating Officer should consider whether it is necessary to halt a particular aspect of the case pending investigation, for example where there are ongoing Court proceedings.

The Investigation

Upon being appointed, the Investigating Officer will:

- i. Conduct an investigation. The complainant will be interviewed and a complaint statement agreed., interviews will also be held with relevant staff as appropriate;
- ii. Produce a report making recommendations about action to be considered;
- iii. Send a copy of the report to the Statutory Complaints Manager bearing in mind that this, together with the local authority's response, needs to be sent to the complainant within the timescale of the receipt of the complaint. A full response to the complaint must not exceed 65 working days.
- iv. The Statutory Complaints Manager will inform the complainant of the timescales and the reasons for any permitted extension, , and wherever possible obtain the complainant's agreement to the extension;
- v. Staff and carers need to be aware that it is a legal requirement upon the authority to undertake investigations when a complaint is made. It is therefore essential that they cooperate with the investigation and provide information to the Investigating Officer through their verbal responses to questions and access to written material.

Action Following Investigation

Upon receiving the Investigating Officer's reports and any supplementary report provided by the Independent Person, the Statutory Complaints Manager will:

- a. Send a copy of the report(s) to the relevant manager of the service complained about and, if the complaint concerns front-line service providers, the staff themselves;
- b. Ask a senior manager reporting to the Director, for his or her adjudication, in consultation with others as necessary, and what action the local authority will be willing to take in relation to the investigation's recommendations
- c. Send a copy of the Investigating Officer's report, any supplementary report prepared by the Independent Person and the local authority's response to the report(s) to the complainant. This must be sent within a maximum of 65 working days of receipt of the complaint
- d. Advise the complainant of the right to submit a request to the Statutory Complaints Manager within 20 working days that the complaint proceed to a Stage Three Review Panel;
- e. Monitor the outcome of the complaint in terms of customer satisfaction with the process and the eventual outcome, and the implications for future service delivery and training.

11. Stage Three - Review Panels

Where Stage 2 of the complaints procedure has been concluded and the complainant is still dissatisfied, , the complainant has 20 working days to ask for the response to be reviewed by a Review Panel. The request should be made to the Statutory Complaints Manager and acknowledged in writing within 2 working days. The Statutory Complaints Manager will ensure a Review Panel is set up and meets within 30 working days of the complainant's Stage Three request being made.

Review Panels are designed to:

- Listen to all parties
- Consider the adequacy of the stage 2 investigation
- Obtain any further information and advice that may help resolve the complaint to all parties satisfaction
- Focus on achieving resolution for the complainant by addressing clearly their complaints and desired outcomes
- Reach findings on each of the complaints being reviewed.

- Make recommendations that provide practical remedies and creative solutions to complex situations
- Support local solutions where the opportunity for resolution between the complainant and the council exists
- To identify any consequent injustice to the complainant where complaints are upheld and to recommend appropriate redress; and
- Recommend any service improvements for action by the council.

As a general rule, Review Panels do not reinvestigate the complaints and would not consider new complaints unless they had been through the Stage 2 process.

The Review Panel must be made up of three independent people, who must not be:

- i. Employees of the authority;
- ii. Elected members of the authority;
- iii. A spouse or partner of either of the above.

One member will be appointed as the Panel Chair. It is good practice that the Chair should not have been employed or an elected member of the authority within the last three years.

The complainant should be notified of the Panel's date and location in writing at least 10 working days before the Review Panel meets and be invited to attend. The complainant should also be informed of their entitlement to be accompanied by another person and for this person to speak on their behalf.

Those persons involved with the investigation at Stage Two (e.g. the Investigating Officer, and the Independent Person) should also be invited to attend.

The Chair should make the final decision on attendees (including asking the local authority to make specific members of staff available to provide specialist advice or opinion).

Panel papers should be sent to panel members and other attendees as soon as these have been agreed by the Chair and no later than 10 working days before the date of the Panel. These should normally include: information on Stage 1 (as relevant), the Stage Two investigation report(s), the local authority's adjudication, any policy, practice or guidance information relevant to the complaint, and any comments that the complainant has submitted to the Panel. The papers should also include information on any local practice around Panels, such as conduct, roles and responsibilities

The Review Panel's recommendations should be recorded in writing and copies sent to the relevant Director within 5 working days.

The Director must respond to the recommendations of the Review Panel and make the decisions known to the complainant within 15 working days, explaining the authority's decision and reasons. If the Director deviates from the panel's recommendations, they should demonstrate their reasoning in the response.

Complainants should be advised of their right to make representations to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman if they are still not satisfied.

The contact details for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman are as follows:

- Website: www.lgo.org.uk
- Address:
- Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
Telephone: **0300 061 0614**

12. Appendix 1: Definition of Roles

Complaints Manager

Key tasks for the Complaints Manager may include:

Overseeing the Procedure by:

- managing, developing, resourcing and administering the complaints procedure;
- overseeing the receipt and investigation of complaints that arise from problems that could not be resolved initially;
- liaising with the Independent Reviewing Officer where appropriate to identify options for resolution;
- appointing Investigating Officers, Review Panellists and Independent Persons;
- ensuring that there are no conflicts of interest at any stage between parties involved in delivering the procedure;
- co-operating with such other persons or bodies as may be necessary in order to investigate or resolve complaints.
- promoting local resolution;
- monitoring the progress of the investigation and ensuring its smooth running;
- making recommendations to the local authority on any other action to take following an investigation;
- working closely with the Panel Chair on the organisation of Stage 3 Review Panels;
- monitoring and reporting on time scales;
- maintaining a written record of complaints made, the procedure followed and the outcome; and
- compiling the annual report.

Maintaining a customer focus by:

- providing a sensitive, customer-focused service for representations and complaints, appropriate to the needs of children and young people;
- providing help and advice to children and young people and others who may wish to make a complaint so that they understand the options available for resolution both within the complaints procedure or alternatives routes of remedy and redress;
- ensuring that advocacy services are explained, offered and provided when
- Getting the Best from Complaints 36
- required;
- ensuring the complainant is kept informed at all stages;
- offering advice on the response of the authority; and

- providing practical support to complainants.

Supporting the local authority by:

- providing guidance, advice and support to staff on management of complaints;
- supporting staff involved in all stages of the complaints procedure;
- commissioning appropriate training;
- overseeing the arrangements for publicity;
- evaluating and reporting on the numbers, types, outcomes and trends of complaints to inform practice, development and service planning; □
- maintaining a pool of people with skills and training needed to conduct investigations; and □ ensuring that commitments given in responses (including adjudications) are implemented.

Investigating Officers (IOs)

The Investigating Officer has overall responsibility for investigating the complaint at Stage 2. Where a member of staff, the Investigating Officer should not be within line management of the service being complained about.

The Investigating Officer's undertakings may include:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - o sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant;
 - o consideration of social work records and other relevant information;
 - o interviewing with staff and other people relevant to the complaint; and
 - o analysing information;
- preparation of the report of the investigation in a clear, plain language;
- effectively liaising with the complainant or his advocate, the Independent Person and the Complaints Manager as appropriate; and
- identifying solutions and recommending courses of action to resolve problems.

Given the importance of providing an efficient response to the complainant, the Investigating Officer will need to prioritise his work effectively and have due regard to the regulated timescales for investigation.

Independent Persons (IPs)

Local authorities must involve an Independent Person (IP) in the investigation of complaints at Stage 2. The person appointed should be neither an Elected Member nor an employee of the local authority, nor a spouse of an employee or member of the authority. Former local authority staff are eligible, but good practice would

suggest at least three years have elapsed since they were employed by the local authority.

The Independent Person may not undertake any other roles in the consideration of the same complaint (such as advocate, or Review Panellist).

The Independent Person should:

- ensure that the process of investigation is open, transparent and fair;
- work alongside the Investigating Officer to provide an independent and objective view to the investigation of complaints;
- see the same relevant files and documents as the Investigating Officer;
- participate in all interviews and discussions relevant to the investigation;
- read the Investigating Officer's report and produce his own report on the investigation;
- comment on each of the complaints and state whether he agrees with the Investigating Officer's findings on them; and
- explain, where necessary, his reasons for considering an investigation to be unfair or incomplete and to advise the complainant of these in his report.

Advocates in the complaints procedure

The role of the advocate was established under the Advocacy Services Representations Procedure (Children) (Amendment) Regulations 2004. The advocate should provide independent and confidential information, advice, representation and support to the child or young person making the complaint. The role of the advocate in the complaints procedure is:

- to empower the child or young person by enabling him to express his views wishes or feelings, or by speaking on his behalf;
- to seek the resolution of any problems or concerns identified by the child or young person by working in partnership with child or young person and only with his agreement;
- to support the child or young person pursuing a complaint through every stage of the complaints procedure and to provide him with information about his rights and options, helping him clarify the complaint and the outcomes he is seeking; and
- to speak for or represent the child or young person at any stage of the complaints process, including at the informal stage or at any formal hearing or interviews.

Further detailed guidance can be found in *Get it Sorted: Providing Effective Advocacy Services for Children and Young People making a Complaint under the Children Act 1989. Department for Education and Skills, 2004.*

Senior managers

A senior manager, within the context of this guidance, is a manager in the local authority with a senior position to make strategic decisions regarding service delivery. This role would ordinarily be met by an Assistant Director or above (though specific designations will vary within each local authority).

Senior managers fulfil two specific roles and should liaise with the Complaints Manager as necessary in delivering these:

Adjudicating Officer

The purpose of the Adjudicating Officer is to consider the complaints, the Investigating Officer and Independent Person's findings, conclusions, and recommendations and the complainant's desired outcomes.

The Adjudicating Officer should invite the complainant to an adjudication meeting, either before or after writing his adjudication.

The Adjudicating Officer writes to the complainant at the end of Stage 2 with details of the adjudication which:

- confirms the local authority's response to the report;
- gives his view on whether the investigation has been thorough and complete;
- states his position on the Investigating Officer's and Independent Person's findings against each point of complaint;
- states any actions that he will be taking and their timescale for implementation;
- confirms the complainant's right to request Stage 3 within 20 working days; and
- reminds the complainant of his right to approach the Local Government Ombudsman at any time.

The Adjudicating Officer should issue the details of the adjudication with the investigation report and the Independent Person's report.

He should also release the reports to his staff as appropriate.

Local authority representative at the Review Panel

The local authority should ordinarily be represented at the Stage 3 Review Panel by the same senior manager who acted as Adjudicating Officer. Where the Adjudicating Officer delegates this role, he should do so to a member of staff with sufficient status in the local authority to represent it.

The Adjudicating Officer should represent the local authority, however, where he has rejected any of the Investigating Officer's findings at Stage 2 or where the Panel Chair requests his attendance.

The local authority representative should:

- provide further information to support the local authority's position;
- consider whether any other member of staff should attend to address specific issues and request their attendance through the Chair;
- prepare a presentation to give to the Panel on the day;
- keep all staff involved in the complaint, but who are not attending the Panel, informed of the proceedings; and
- act on any recommendations from the Panel (as required by the Director).

Review Panellists

The Panel consists of a Chair and two other people appointed by the local authority. All Panel members must be independent – this means people who are neither members nor officers of the local authority to which the representations have been made, nor the spouse or civil partner of such people. In appointing the Panel Chair, former members or officers of the local authority may be considered on a case-by-case basis, but good practice suggests that three years should have elapsed since.

The panellists should:

- read Panel papers in advance of the meeting;
- attend for the entirety of the Panel and contribute to the consideration of the complaint through the Chair;
- support the Chair by taking an active part in the decision making process;
- contribute to deliberations and the wording of the Panel's findings; and
- provide relevant opinion based on any specialist skills, knowledge and awareness that they have in respect of the presenting complaint.

Independent Chair of the Review Panel

The role of the Chair is to:

- confer with the Complaints Manager about the specific needs of the complainant;
- agree who will attend as the local authority representative and request the attendance of any other persons who may assist in understanding the complaint and its context;
- chair the Panel meeting by ensuring that the complaint is heard in full;
- operate flexibly in response to the individual needs of each Panel member;
- ensure that the Panel runs smoothly and that each participant is given an opportunity to contribute appropriately;
- ensure that all participants are treated with respect throughout the process;

- in consultation with the other Panellists, ensure that the premeeting, presentations and deliberations are of proportionate length to ensure appropriate consideration of the complaint and to enable the Panel to reach its conclusions;
- manage the Panel's deliberations to produce a timely and full response to the complainant and local authority within five working days of the Panel meeting;
- ensure that any disagreements of position among the Panellists are recorded and seek to reach a majority decision where necessary; and
- be available to meet local authority staff, if needed, after the Panel meeting to discuss any recommendations arising.

Clerk to the Panel

The local authority will need to provide administrative support for the operation of the panel which may be in the form of a clerk. It may be sensible for this role to be filled by a separate officer to that of the Complaints Manager. The clerk should assist in the appointment of the Panel through to the production of its final recommendations to the local authority.

Tasks the clerk might undertake include:

- organising the venue, facilities and refreshments;
- distributing written submissions from the complainant and the authority;
- supporting the Complaints Manager and Chair as required;
- ensuring that procedure on the day is adhered to;
- taking notes to facilitate the Panellists' decisions;
- specifying with the complainant whether he will be bringing any representatives or witnesses with him and assist as necessary; and
- providing administrative support to the Chair and Panel to produce and issue the final recommendations to the local authority complainant and other attendees within five working days.

Independent Reviewing Officers

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) do not have a role in instigating the complaints procedure themselves, and should not stand in the way of complaints being made. They will have a role when they meet children to inform them that they have a right to make complaints to the local authority, and of the local authority's responsibility to provide them with an independent advocate should the child so wish.

The IRO may be part of the solution to the problem, and the Complaints Manager may consult with the IRO to determine what options are available. An outstanding formal complaint using the local authority's complaints procedure should not prevent the IRO from fulfilling their role in resolving problems by negotiation. The IRO may have a role in communicating both with the child and with the Complaints Manager. The IRO should not prejudice the complaints procedure but their work may help to

speed up the process or even hold a key to its resolution. The IRO should become involved in serious complaints concerning children's care plans. They should not usually need to get involved in more minor complaints about a child's day to day care.

In all cases the welfare of the child is the primary concern. IROs will need to make a judgement about whether a problem raised via a complaint is serious enough to constitute a breach of the child's human rights such as to justify making a referral to CAFCASS, or whether it would be reasonable to await a resolution through the complaints procedure, with or without additional support of the IROs own negotiation.

For more information on the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer, please refer to *Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance: Adoption and Children Act 2002*.
Department for Education & Skills 2004.

13. Appendix 2: Flowchart of Children's Complaints

