



***Lewisham Children and Young
People's Fostering Service
Statement of Purpose 2023/2024***

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Introduction

The Fostering Service is part of Lewisham's Corporate Parenting Service, within the Children and Young People's Department. The aim of the Fostering Service is to recruit and support a range of Foster Carers who can provide appropriate quality placements to meet the diverse needs of children and young people who are looked after in the care of Lewisham, as their Corporate Parent. The Fostering Service provides a range of skilled Foster Carers who have been trained to provide safe and nurturing care for children and young people. This Statement of Purpose sets out how the Lewisham Fostering Service works, including information about services, support, and facilities available to Foster Carers, including Family & Friends (Connected) Foster Carers.

The Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Children Act 1989, the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011, Care Planning Regulations 2010, and Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (2013) and promotes the principles and practices enshrined in this legislation.

The Lewisham Fostering Service is located at Laurence House in Catford, alongside other Children and Young People's Services. A fostering hub is also situated at Bromley Road, in Catford, which provides an additional focussed space for delivering fostering services.



Guiding Principles

Commitment to Equality and Diversity

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity, difference, and seeks to provide a service underpinned by the principle of fairness and equal treatment of all carers, children, and young people. Our anti-discriminatory and anti-racist approach seeks to proactively promote equality and diversity, to ensure that the uniqueness and complexities of all children, young people and families are well understood and given consideration whenever a child is matched with a Foster Carer.

The Fostering Service is committed to the following principles:

- ✓ To put the child at the centre of what we do and support Foster Carers to do the same
- ✓ Each child has their own individual needs and those should be recognised and met in their foster care placement
- ✓ To promote and safeguard the welfare of children throughout their childhood
- ✓ To promote working in partnership with children and their families
- ✓ To ensure equality of opportunity

- ✓ To ensure all children fulfil their potential in education
- ✓ To ensure all Children's Health needs are met
- ✓ To ensure that young people are supported to move into independence in a planned way
- ✓ To provide children with a caring safe experience of living in foster families where they develop a true sense of belonging
- ✓ To listen to children and young people and take their views into consideration and meet these wherever possible and when this is in their best interests
- ✓ To promote equality of opportunity recognising and providing for each child and young person. Children must be cared for in a manner which respects their ethnicity, disability, religious and cultural beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, age and social class.
- ✓ To work in an open and accessible way treating children, young people and their families and carers with fairness and respect
- ✓ Good outcomes for children are achieved from quality placements which value Foster Carers and promote a multi-agency team around the looked after child

Fostering Service Aims and Objectives

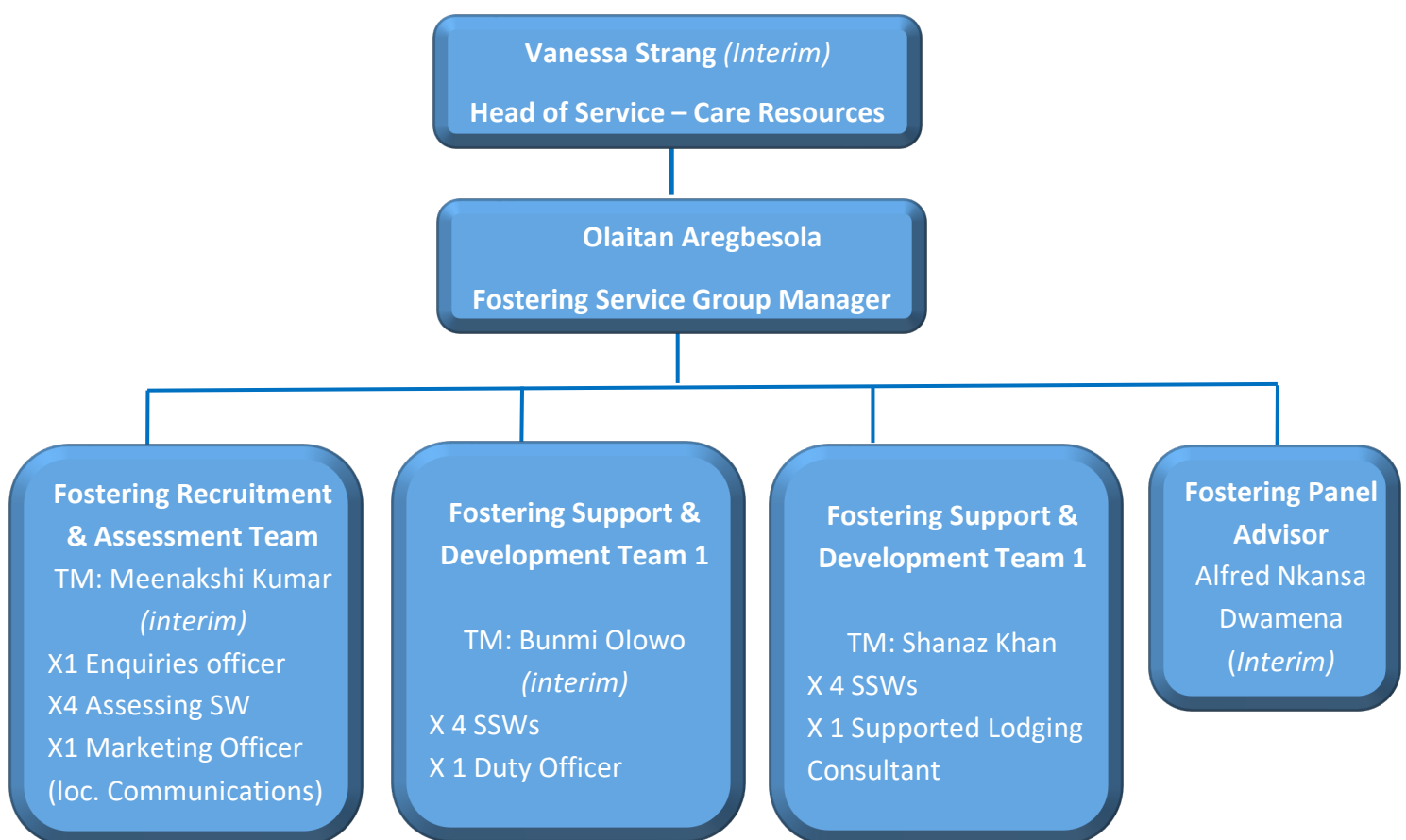
- The aim of the Fostering Service is to provide safe, secure, and effective foster care placements for those looked after children and young people who are unable to live with their birth families
- Foster care is a partnership between the Foster Carer, supervising social worker, child's social worker, independent reviewing officer, multi-agency professionals, the child, young person, and their family
- The Service works closely to ensure effective delivery of wraparound services for all children cared for by Lewisham Foster Carers.
- The cultural, religious, racial, and linguistic identity of children, their parents and carers must be respected in the development of the service, and when supervising and supporting Foster Carers, children and young people in their foster care placements
- The actual cost of caring for a child or young person must be met and Foster Carers given the opportunity to receive payment for their time skills and experience
- Foster Carers are expected to prepare for their role and are responsible to work with the Service to make use of development and training opportunities
- Foster Carers, children and young people looked after, independent reviewing officers, social workers, and the children of Foster Carers, must be given the opportunity to record their views and feedback about placements
- Young people leaving care must be offered agency support that recognises the need for preparation and support into adulthood

The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service is part of the Children and Young Persons Directorate and provides services to children looked after and care leavers who are Staying Put or living with Supported Lodgings carers. The overall responsibility for the service rests with the 'Responsible Individual' who is the Director of Children's Social Care. The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Service for Care Resources whose role it is to make appropriate decisions on recommendations made the by the Fostering Panel to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

The Fostering Group Manager reports to the Head of Service for Care Resources in the wider Corporate Parenting Service. All fostering Team Managers and the Fostering Panel Adviser report directly to the Fostering Group Manager, who has the responsibility as defined in the Fostering Service Regulations as: 'the person tasked with oversight of the day-to-day operations of the fostering service'.

Fostering Service Structure Chart



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The Service is staffed with qualified and non-social work staff, to run the fostering duty service, manage all initial enquiries from potential foster care applicants and lead on recruitment marketing activity.

All fostering staff members have an up-to-date DBS check and receive regular supervision and annual performance appraisals. All staff have access to a wide range of learning and development opportunities delivered by Lewisham's Workforce Development Service, including specific opportunities for managers to develop leadership and management skills. They can also access multi agency safeguarding training through the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP).

[Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership - LSCP \(safeguardinglewisham.org.uk\)](https://safeguardinglewisham.org.uk)

All staff are trained in Lewisham's practice model, Signs of Safety, including completion of a bespoke Corporate Parenting module, Connection and Belonging being delivered throughout 2023.



Partnerships

To meet the needs of looked after children and young people and provide opportunities to improve their outcomes, partnership working and maintaining close links with relevant stakeholders is promoted by the Fostering Service. Key partners are:

- MASH/EDT and Assessment Service
- Family Safeguarding Service & Meliot Family Centre
- Integrated Adolescent Service, Safe Space & Missing Team
- Youth Justice Service
- Corporate Parenting Service, including children looked after and care leavers
- Children with Complex Needs Service
- Connected Person and Special Guardianship Assessment Team
- Special Guardianship Post Order Support Team
- Children's Placements Team
- The Quality Assurance Service Including: Independent Reviewing & LADO
- The Children in Care Council and Participation Team
- Virtual School and Education Services
- Health Partners
- Metropolitan Police
- Lewisham Housing Service
- CAMHS
- The Fostering Network
- Coram BAAF

The Service promotes a culture of joint working and has introduced practice standards to offer regular joint social work and supervising social work visits to all Lewisham Foster Carers with children in placement. The Service aims to remain up to date with the latest research and Government policy and practice developments and changes in legislation.

Types of Foster Care

Short Term Fostering

Short term Foster Carers offer task focussed care for children and young people in accordance with their care plan and offer placements for as long as is needed, and until permanency is achieved for the child. It includes placements where the plan is for a child to return home or move to an alternative permanent placement. These carers work with a range of professionals to achieve the expected outcomes as set out in the child's care plan. Several children may remain with their short-term carers on a long term and permanent basis following consultation and agreement with the carer, social work team and if this is in accordance with the child's care plan and their wishes and feelings

Permanent and Long-Term Fostering

Where it has been decided that a child cannot return home, and their care plan is to remain in Local Authority care, living in a long-term fostering placement is the placement option, recognising the emotional significance of permanence for children and young people. Children will remain in long-term fostering arrangements until at least 18 years old and opportunities for a Staying Put arrangement will always be considered, so they can remain with their former carers until they reach the age of 21. When a decision has been made for a child to remain in the care of their short-term Foster Carer, or move to a long-term Foster Carer, this proposed match must be presented to the independent Fostering Panel with a recommendation about the proposed long-term match as soon as possible, after this plan has been agreed.

Emergency Foster Carers

In 2023, the Fostering Service successfully approved a group of carers dedicated to providing an emergency service, offering placements to children and young people out of usual office hours, in the evenings and weekends. The placements are intended as short term and to last a maximum of 10 days, whilst arrangements are made for the individual child and young person in accordance with their care plan. The short-term nature of these arrangements means vacancies are maintained, which ensures the success the scheme. Emergency Foster Carers receive additional specific support related to their role from a senior supervising worker.

Respite Foster Care

Respite carers are registered Foster Carers offering this specific service. Respite carers offer short term, regular or one-off support to children and young people and their main carers for a variety of reasons, including:

- as part of a placement stability package,
- offering care to the children young person when the main carer needs to travel or attend an appointment, and it is not possible for the child to accompany them.

Parent and Child Placements

These Foster Carers are specifically trained to care for children and their parents in the carer's household. Parents and Child carers are trained to support parents on how to appropriately parent their children. *Lewisham currently do not have any parent and child carers and is actively seeking to recruit as part of our Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25.*

Family and Friends (Connected) Carers

This arrangement relates to carers approved to look after a specific child or children known to them as either family members, their friends, or friends of their parents. These carers usually have a pre-existing relationship with the child or young person, before the Local Authority accommodated them. Connected Carers include temporary approved of Carers under Regulations 24 & 25 of Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations 2010, and fully approved carers via a Fostering Panel recommendation and an Agency Decision. Connected Carers are supported and managed in context of the same Fostering Policies, Standards and Regulations and are registered as Foster Carers and are required to comply fully with the expectations and functions outlined in the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

Regulation 24 - Temporary approved Foster Carers

The assessment of individuals with a pre-existing relationship with the child, are completed by the child's social team, who can access advice and guidance in completing these assessments from the Special Guardianship and Connected Persons Assessment Team. Completed assessments are quality assured by the child's social work team manager and sent to the team manager of the Special Guardianship Assessment Team. Completed final assessment reports are authorised by the Head of Service for Care Resources, or another Head of Service if needed. Temporary Foster Carers are issued with a foster care agreement and receive financial and other support services, in accordance with the Fostering Regulations.

All Temporary Approved Connected Carers are allocated Supervising Social Workers (SSW). Routine monitoring of all these arrangements is completed by the Head of Service, Special Guardianship Connected Person and Assessment team manager and the team manager who oversees the supervising social workers allocated to these families. Permanency assessments of Regulation 24 carers are allocated and completed by assessing social workers in the Special Guardianship Connected Person and Assessment Team. Any extensions into Regulation 25 arrangements and oversight of any placements that exceed the 24-week regulatory period are assessed and approved by the Head of Service for Care Resources and all these arrangements are reviewed in the Family and Friends Panel. Children living in these arrangements will have their permanency secured in the following ways:

- Return home
- Carers obtaining a Special Guardianship Order (SGO)
- Carers obtaining a Child Arrangement Order (CAO)
- Carers recommended for full Connected Carers approval via the Fostering Panel

Special Guardianship and Connected Carers Assessments

The Special Guardianship and Connected Carers Assessment Team undertake permanency assessments of individuals seeking a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) who are either temporary approved Foster Carers under Regulation 24 or intend to take on the full time and permanent care of child who they have a pre-existing relationship with, who may not currently live with them. The team also assess Regulation 24 carers to be approved a fully approved connected carers when this is in accordance with the child's care plan. Close working relationships ensure a seamless transition to the Special Guardianship Post Order Team for the delivery of support services, as detailed in the SGO support plan

Staying Put

Lewisham promotes Staying Put which encourages young people to remain with their former carers after their eighteenth birthday. This ensures that young people can remain with their former Foster Carers until they are well prepared and ready for adult life. The Staying Put policy and procedure sets out the conditions and associated financial implications to ensure consistent practice. It is important to emphasise that young people in Staying Put arrangements are legally not children looked after and therefore, fostering arrangements no longer apply. While the legal basis on which they occupy the former foster care home changes, this does not mean that the young person should be treated differently; rather, the placement should be carefully planned to ensure that the young person and the carer(s) understand the nature of the arrangement and the positive aspects of being in foster care are not diminished.

The Staying Put procedure is applicable to all young people Looked After by Lewisham who are living with Foster Carers on their eighteenth birthday, whether they are with Lewisham carers or with Independent Fostering Agency carers (IFA). The policy also applies to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who reach the age of 18. However, in circumstances where the young person does not have leave to remain and has exhausted all their rights to appeal, continued financial support will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Young people who are in residential placements are not covered by the Staying Put procedure, but early transition planning is essential for these young people to help them achieve good outcomes in the future.

Supported Lodgings Scheme

Fostering Service recently reviewed the current Supported Lodgings Scheme. The scheme is currently aligned to the Fostering Service. There is a named coordinator who supervises the scheme providers. The scheme makes provision for young adults, 18 years and above, transitioning to adult life. The coordinator works closely with the Child Social Worker and Personal Advisor to ensure that transition to independent living is well supported.

Placements and Matching Children and Young people with Lewisham Foster Carers

Careful matching it is critical to support children and young people benefit from being in care. All new placement requests and any placement changes are managed through Lewisham 's Children's Placement Service who work in partnership with the Fostering Service. Placements with Lewisham Foster Carers is the first placement choice for any child and young person in need of care, and when all opportunities for them to live with a connected carer have been exhausted. The Placements Service ensures all placement plans are shared immediately with the in-house fostering duty service, allowing a placement search within Lewisham 's Foster Carer group to be completed.

The child's placement plan provides details of the child's background, their identified needs, and desired outcomes of a care placement. The Placement Service seeks to ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his/ their assessed needs. Other information such as the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and their family are used to help make the right matches. Good matches are achieved by means of information sharing and involving all relevant professionals, the child and her/his/ their family and potential carers, their families, and other children in placement. Where there are gaps in meeting a child's need, this is discussed and plans to meet the need are put in place.

The Fostering Service offers a daily duty Service and in 2023, introduced a dedicated fostering Duty Officer to this role, who is supported by a backup SSW and managed by the duty Fostering Manager. The Duty Officer will review current vacancies and have initial telephone conversations with potential carers about children in need of a placement. When the carer is considering offering a placement, a copy of the child's placement plan is shared with the Foster Carers, using secure e-mail, to enable carers to consider the needs of the young person in more detail and decide if they can care for the child and meet their needs.

In the event a suitable match is identified, the duty officer will work with the child's social work team and Foster Carer to make suitable arrangements to place the child. For planned placements, every opportunity will be made to share the child foster care profile with the child and young person and hold a placement planning meeting before the start of the placement. For many same day and short notice placements, the information is shared later, and the placement planning meeting held within 5 working days.

Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

The Recruitment and Assessment team aims to recruit Foster Carers who can meet the wide range of needs of children and young people who become Looked After so they can live with Lewisham Foster Carers. The recruitment of new mainstream carers supports one of the pledges in Lewisham's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24, 'My Home' and is a key aim of the Placements Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25 to increase the number of available in house foster homes and provide placement choice for children and young people.

A marketing and recruitment officer is now located in the Corporate Communications Team of the Council, reporting to a manager in the children's workforce development team because they also support social work recruitment. There is a close working relationship with the fostering recruitment team, seeking the most appropriate methods of advertising the service and encouraging people from a wide range of backgrounds to apply to Lewisham to become Foster Carers. The recruitment activity is delivered in accordance with the recruitment and retention of new Foster Carers strategy and supported by an annual communications plan using a mixed marketing approach.

All members of the public interested in fostering are able find out more through the Council's website, including the opportunity to complete an initial interest form, telephoning or emailing the service, attending in person community-based events, and through a weekly advertised Fostering Drop in Event at Bromley Road, or an office visit to the Fostering Hub at Bromley Road during office hours .

Foster Carer preparation training and assessment.

The Service has fully subscribed to the Stage 1 & Stage 2 fostering assessment process in accordance with the 2013 Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Regulations.

Stage 1 - Initial Enquiry and Acceptance of Application

When an enquiry is received from a potential Foster Carer, a same day, or within 48 hours if received at the weekend or during Bank Holidays, the Fostering Recruitment and Enquiries Officer makes a follow up call to have a detailed discussion with the enquirer, providing more information about becoming a Foster Carer and the different stages involved. This helps to establish if the enquirers circumstances are suitable to progress beyond the initial enquiry stage. All enquirers are treated with openness and respect and people are invited to 'rule themselves in' to the possibility of becoming a Foster Carer, and any myths or perceived barriers are addressed in the initial phone call. The spectrum of fostering arrangements is discussed for example, people without a spare room can be considered to foster a baby who can share the Foster Carers bedroom. When an enquirer can fulfil the essential requirements needed to foster; suitable space and time available in their home and life to be a potential Foster Carer, arrangements are made for a home visit to take place within five working days to discuss the applicant's interest further. All enquirers are now sent an information leaflet about Fostering for

Lewisham. The Fostering Service place a high priority on supporting all applicants and Stage One and Two progress simultaneously.

The Initial Visit

A social worker from the Recruitment and Assessment Team will complete a home visit to the enquirer. This is an opportunity for an in depth and detailed discussion about becoming a Foster Carer and has a dual purpose of collecting information from potential applicants about their circumstances, and for the social worker to provide more information about fostering for Lewisham, including the training and assessment process and the support offered to register Foster Carers.

When it is apparent that the enquirer is suitable to move to the next stage in the assessment process, the visiting social worker will provide them with a fostering application form which includes seeking consent to complete required checks and references to become a registered Foster Carer as follows:

- Disclosure and Barring Service checks – DBS (police references are obtained on all members of the household aged 18 years and over)
- Medical checks (the applicant's doctor will be asked to complete a health assessment report that will be forwarded to the Fostering Panel's medical advisor for review and comment)
- Local Authority checks (information held on children services database)
- Schools' and employers' checks
- Details of former partners (where relevant)
- Housing Checks and Reports
- NSPCC Checks
- OFSTED
- Social Media
- References from all employers where the prospective carer(s) have worked with children and other vulnerable groups
- A file review and references if carer(s) were previously approved by another fostering agency.

Following the initial visit, the findings will be discussed with the Manager of the Recruitment and Assessment Team to agree next steps. Receipt of application forms is closely monitored and follow up will take place within five working days of an application form being issued.

Preparation Training – Skills to Foster

All foster care applicants who are successfully moving along the approval journey are invited to attend Skills to foster training, which is the opportunity for them to find out in a supportive group learning environment about the needs of children and young people looked after and the role and responsibilities of Foster Carers. The training contains an assessment element, and all

applicants receive feedback to contribute to the full foster care assessment. Skills to Foster Carer training is usually completed in three sessions delivered by social workers in the Assessment Team with contributions from carers and children and young people with care experience, working closely with Lewisham 's Children in Care Council.

Stage 2 - Assessment of Foster Carers

The Lewisham Fostering Service has a procedure in place for the assessment of Foster Carers which outlines the process to be followed when assessing potential carers. It includes the requirement to complete and provide all the information as outlined in the Fostering Regulations 2011 & 2013. A qualified social worker conducts the full assessment. Whenever an assessment is completed, there is a mandatory requirement for the report to be shared with the applicant(s) to confirm factual accuracy of the information gathered. Applicants are required to comment and sign the report to verify that they have read and agreed with the contents before the report and recommendations can be presented to the Fostering Panel. The aim is to complete Stage 1 and 2 within 20 weeks. Every effort will be made to ensure there are no delays and applicants are given regular up to date progress of their application until the assessment is finalised.

Approval of Foster Carers

All completed prospective Foster Carer's assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration and recommendation of approval.

Pre-Panel Information to Applicants

Information for applicants attending the Fostering Panel Meeting is sent out which outlines the roles, functions, and membership of the Fostering Panel. Foster care applicants and approved Foster Carers attend Panel for their Annual Reviews are provided with a member's profile booklet so they can familiarise themselves with Panel members before joining the Panel meeting. Following approval and registration as a Lewisham Foster Carer, all Foster Carers are transferred to receive support and supervision from one of the two Support and Development Teams within the Service.

The Fostering Panel and Approval

The Fostering Panel is a group of people with considerable experience of fostering and childcare and includes people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, including a registered Foster Carer and an adult with recent care experience. The Fostering Regulations require a minimum of two independent members on the Panel and five Panel members in total to make the Panel quorate. Lewisham 's Fostering Panel is chaired by an independent professional with experience in fostering and other childcare settings. Fostering Panel members will consider the Form F assessment report and ask any necessary questions to the presenting social worker and applicants.

The Panel recommendations are communicated verbally to the applicants by the chairperson on the day of the Panel meeting. The Fostering Panel recommendations do not constitute a final decision of an applicant's suitability. All panel recommendations are forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who makes the final determination on the suitability of a fostering application. The ADM makes this determination within 7 days of receipt of recommendation and the final set of minutes from panel. Applicants receive verbal feedback of the decision within 2 days followed by a written outcome within ten working days.

Where the Fostering Panel do not make a positive recommendation, the applicant will have a right of appeal, either to a Lewisham Appeal Panel which would be convened for this purpose, or they can apply to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism. In these circumstances, the Agency Decision Maker will make a 'qualifying determination' about their decision, and applicants have three options:

- a) Accept the qualifying determination; or
- b) Make written representation to the Fostering Service provider; or
- c) Apply for the qualifying determination to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) panel

A Handover meeting is arranged with the assessing social worker and the allocated SSW who will go through the welcome pack with the new carers, including:

Fostering Agreement

All newly approved Foster Carers are required to sign a Foster Carer's Agreement. The Agreement outlines the contractual relationship between the carer/s and the Service and forms the basis of a social contract between Lewisham Fostering Service and Foster Carers, and details what we expect from each other.

Foster Carer Handbook

All newly approved carers are issued with the Lewisham Foster Carer handbook which provides details of areas relevant to caring for looked after children and young people, expectations of carers and how to access support services.

Support, Training and Development for Foster Carers

Foster Carers are allocated a named supervising social worker (SSW) who will provide regular supervision and support, including assisting carers to access training as part of their professional development. The allocated SSW is expected to be aware of the demands of each placement and be available to offer regular telephone support and at minimum, a face-to-face home visit at intervals of no more than 6 weeks, including a minimum of one unannounced visit annually. Newly approved carers receive 2 weekly visits over the first 6 weeks of approval, thereafter 4 weekly visits in the first year of approval. Each carer's SSW has a duty to assess the needs of the carer and to identify whether additional support and training may be required.

SSW recordings are made about each supervisory visit and copies shared with carers for factual accuracy and information sharing purposes. Where the fostering household has more than one registered carer, SSWs ensure that both carers are met with on a regular basis, as well as the carers own children and any regular visitors. SSWs ensure they meet with any looked after child in placement, at every alternative visit, providing the opportunity to observe the relationship between the carer and the child and seek feedback from the child and young person about living in the foster home. All new carers have a foster carer mentor appointed to offer support during their first year of fostering.

Foster Carer Recordings

Carers are expected to keep a daily log for each child in placement; these are recorded in weekly log templates and sent to the SSWs on a weekly basis. Separate recordings must be done for each child in placement. Training is provided on keeping records.

Training, Development and Support Groups

The Fostering Service is committed to providing continuous professional development and training opportunities. Training is an integral part of a fostering career and begins during the assessment process with the 'Skills to Foster' course. All new carers are required to complete 6 training events each year. Training needs are identified jointly with the carer's SSW and form the carers Personal Development Plan, reviewed in the Foster Carer Annual Review.

The Lewisham Fostering Service training programme is reviewed annually, offering a broad range of learning opportunities to provide carers with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills, supporting positive outcomes for children and young people. Alongside mandatory training, carers also have access to arrange of specialist training to enable them to become highly skilled, competent, and better prepared for the challenges of fostering. More trauma informed courses have been added to the programme to support carers cope with the complexity of looking after children who have experienced trauma. Carer training is delivered both virtually and face -to-face, with more courses also delivered over the weekend to provide flexibility for

those carers who are working. There is a dedicated Business Support Officer, who provides training administrative support.

All foster carers are required to complete the Training Support and Development Standards. Mainstream carers within 12 months and connected cares 18 months. Workshops and workbooks are reviewed and 'signed off' by the SSW. Carers have access to a variety of support groups and details about groups is included and published in the annual Foster Care Training and Development Programme.

The Fostering Network and Fostering Advisory Board (FAB)

All Lewisham Foster Carers have Fostering Network membership fees paid by the Fostering Service which entitles all carers to free independent advice and legal representation if required. Carers can also access information through the Fostering Network helpline.

FAB was formed in 2021 with the explicit purpose of working like a foster care association, as the formal body representing the voice of Foster Carers in Lewisham. This forum provides a two-way communication function, seeking the views of carers to share with the Service and sharing Service information with carers. FAB representatives meet regularly with the fostering Group Manager, Team Managers, Head of Service and other key managers in the department. Three FAB Foster Carers are core members of the Corporate Parenting Board. A review of the terms of reference and ways of working with FAB is due in Autumn 2023.

As part of the ongoing recognition and value Lewisham Council places on our Foster Carers, Children and Young People's Directorate hosts an annual award and celebratory event for Lewisham carers.

Foster Carer Annual Reviews

The Fostering Regulations require that Foster Carers are reviewed annually to consider their suitability to continue as approved carer's. Additional reviews can be completed at any time if there is a change of circumstances, or as directed by the Fostering Panel, Fostering Group Manager or ADM. The Fostering Service is committed to a transparent Annual Foster Carer Review process which includes a self-assessment by carers, consultations, and feedback from all members of the carer household, children's social workers, child and young people who have, or are still living with the Foster Carers, and Independent Reviewing Officers.

The Annual Review meeting is held in the carer's home and chaired by the SSW. Carers are expected to evidence how they have met the competencies in their practice and reflect on how the training they have attended, has helped to develop their skills, knowledge, and experience. The purpose of the review is to ensure high-quality care is in place and the household remains suitable to continue as registered Foster Carers for Lewisham.

The Foster Carer Annual Review considers the following:

- The Carer's experience of the previous 12 months of fostering and their views.
- Progress and/or completion of Training, Development & Support plan. Training and support group attendance and continuous professional development needs
- The views of children, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child's Social Worker
- Statutory checks i.e., Disclosure, Barring & Service (DBS) and medicals every three years.
- Any additional support required

Fostering Allowances

The foster care allowance Scheme is reviewed annually and may include increase in allowances and or competency. **The weekly allowance** is made up of two elements:

The Child Care Allowance:

This payment is made to mainstream and connected carers for the full maintenance and care of the fostered child. It is structured to meet a child's needs.

The Competence Payment element:

This payment is recognition of the skills and knowledge carers employ to look after children, paid to mainstream and connected carers. In April 2022, the competency allowance was introduced for Reg. 24 carers.

Foster Carers are required to register as self-employed to pay National Insurance and Tax.

Child Care Allowance Component

The allowance is intended to cover all the general costs associated with the care of the child or young person and aimed at maintaining an expected standard of care for them. This includes items purchased directly to meet the child's needs such as food, clothing, and social activities. It also covers indirect costs such as family transport, outings and any additional general household maintenance e.g. utilities and cleaning. Additional annual birthday, festival and holidays payments are made. To support carers in managing the weekly allowance, guidance about percentages to be allocated for different costs is in the Fostering Financial Allowances Policy.

Fostering Allowance Payment

Fostering allowances will be paid weekly directly into carers bank accounts. On occasion there may be circumstances which mean that an enhanced foster care payment is paid. Details of enhanced payments and the procedure to apply for an enhancement are included in the Fostering Financial Allowances Policy.

Children and Young People's Savings

Children's Services saves money each week for each child who is Looked After, this is separate to fostering allowances. The savings are maintained by the Local Authority until such time that the child becomes eligible for a Government backed Shared Foundation ISA Account. – All children eligible for the ISA account will have their savings paid directly to the account by a standing order.

Promoting children and young people's care

Children and Young People's Education, Talents and Interests

Through training and ongoing support carers the Fostering Service prepares and encourages carers to promote and support each child's education by working alongside the child's social worker, the Virtual School and by providing a home environment that stimulates and values the experience of learning and education. Carers would be expected to attend termly Personal Education Planning Meetings (PEPs), Education Review Meetings, Parent/Carer evenings and school activity and open days, especially when supporting children and young people with a school / college transition. Social worker and carers in collaboration are also expected to promote and support children and young people's talents, hobbies and interests to help them develop their other life skills. That may include attending clubs and afterschool activities.

Children and Young People's Health

The Fostering Service promotes the health and development needs of children and young people living in foster care. There is an expectation that the health information for each child is provided to carers prior to the child being placed, and no later than 5 working days if the information is not readily available at the point of placement. All children and young people must be registered with a GP and dentist close to the carers home, if they are not already registered, or their previous registration is not in a suitable location. Carers are required to complete the children's mental health screening tool (SDQ) and are also responsible to support children to attend medical, dental, and other health care appointments, including any CAMHS appointments.

Family Time / Contact

Carers will actively support, promote, and facilitate safe contact between children, young people and their family and friends, to maintain a connection and sense of belonging with their family and network. Carers will either facilitate and supervise contact if needed, and support children and young people to attend supervised family time arrangements as part of their care plan. Carers are also encouraged and supported to promote friendships and relationships with their family and friends' network, giving the child a sense of belonging in the foster family.

Preparation for independence

Carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences, information, skills, and advice that will support them in this objective. The aim of the Fostering Service is to improve placement choices for young people through Staying Put and Supported Lodgings, and early planning by the child's social worker, in consultation with the carer and SSW must take place to consider these options.

Safeguarding, Allegations and Standards of Care

The Fostering Service is compliant with the Pan London Safeguarding Procedures and all local Lewisham procedures.

[London Safeguarding Children Procedures](#)

[Lewisham Children's Services Procedures Manual \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

The Fostering Service has a clear procedure regarding allegations, complaints, and concerns against Foster Carers. Any allegation made by a child or young person against a Foster Carer, member of the household or within the carers network, is referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in the area where the carer lives. The LADO also monitors any investigations and standards of care outside borough regarding Lewisham Foster Carers the Service will ensure that carers have clear written information and updates about any investigation and ensure they are made aware of all supports available, including, support from their SSW, FAB and through their individual Fostering Network membership. The Group Manager tracks all allegations, investigations and standard of care incidents with the LADO.

Quality Assurance & Continuous Development of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service's aims to deliver an excellent service designed around the needs of children, young people, their families, and their Foster Carers in accordance with Council policies and priorities. The Service considers recruitment and retaining Foster Carers as pivotal priority in achieving quality care and support for children who are cared for by the Council. The Service and all plans are developed in accordance with the key principles, aims and priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-24, Children and Young Peoples Plan and Placements Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25, and any changes in Government policy, procedure, and legislation.

The Fostering Service, as part of the Corporate Parenting - Care Resources Service is expected to provide quarterly progress reports to the Corporate Parenting Board, which is chaired by the Lead Elected Member for Children's Services and attended by Senior Managers across Lewisham Council and the local partnership.

Children and Young People's Service Quality Assurance Framework, sets out the mechanisms by which all services in the Directorate will be audited and standards of practice are routinely monitored and checked. The Fostering Service is subject to routine audit as part of the wider Quality Assurance auditing schedule.

The Fostering Service prides itself as a listening service and is part of a learning organisation. Working alongside the Children in Care Council and the Participation Officer, we seek feedback from children and young people in care and those who are care experienced (care leavers) to help review and inform policies and practice.

Feedback from carers is also critical to the development of the service. The Fostering Service seeks the views of carers through a variety of channels, including routine supervisory visits, support groups, Annual Reviews, regular meetings with FAB and through an annual foster care survey which FAB contribute to drafting. The Fostering Service welcomes compliments and well as constructive feedback on what we do well and areas we should improve. All compliments and feedback should be sent directly to the Fostering Service Group Manager and are used to inform practice and policy development.

The Fostering Services regularly reviews its practices and benchmarks with best performing Local Authorities and fostering agencies. We also try to seek feedback and views from all relevant stakeholders i.e. Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, partners in health and education, Fostering Panel Members, Lewisham's Children's Safeguarding Partnership and OFSTED.

Review of Statement of Purpose

In accordance with the Fostering Service Regulation, 2011, this Statement of Purpose shall be reviewed annually.

How to contact the Fostering Service

2nd Floor, Laurence House. 1 Catford Road. London. SE6 4RU

45 Bromley Road, London. SE6 2UA.

Telephone: 020 8314 3663

More information can be found on Lewisham Council' website: [Lewisham Council - Fostering](#)

OFSTED Contact:

Piccadilly Gate. Store Street. Manchester M1 2WD

125 Kingsway. London. WC2B 6SE. Telephone:0300 123 1231