

Croydon Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2026-2027

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The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 Part 2 states that a fostering service must compile a written statement of purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which are provided.

The Statement of Purpose is a significant document that sets a framework for all the business of the fostering service. It must be consistent with relevant legislation, regulations, National Minimum Standards (NMS) and statutory guidance. The statement must be child focused and show how the fostering service will help children achieve positive outcomes.

The manager of the Fostering Service must ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner consistent with the Statement of Purpose. This document will be reviewed at least once annually. Any amendments due to changes in legislation or guidance will be incorporated into a new Statement of Purpose.

The Statement of Purpose makes reference to the Croydon Foster Carers' Charter. <https://croydonfch.trixonline.co.uk/chapter/foster-carers-charter> The Foster Carers' Charter was produced by the Fostering Network with support from a range of organisations including the Department for Education, ADCS and FosterTalk.

The charter represents a commitment on behalf of the placing authority in its role as the corporate parent, the Fostering Service and the foster carer to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care.

The Charter confirms The Corporate Parenting commitment to provide the best care for the children we look after. The Charter is a statement of Croydon's commitment to ensuring that, unless the child's needs require otherwise, the children in our care will be looked after in a family environment that is safe and nurturing and that supports them to achieve their full potential as individuals.

The Charter is our recognition of the crucial daily role that foster carers have in the lives of the children they have welcomed into their homes and families.

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2026/2027

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Croydon Council Fostering Service. The Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011 require all Fostering Services to provide a written annual Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and the services and facilities provided. The information to be contained in the Statement of Purpose is prescribed in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Statement of Purpose is to be regularly reviewed and formally updated every twelve months. This document is made available, upon request, to foster carers and prospective foster carers, any child placed by the service, the parent of any child looked after and staff. It is also available on Croydon Council website.

The Statement is informed by:

- Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services
- Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011
- The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011

Values, Aims and Objectives

Croydon Council Fostering Service is committed to providing safe, stable, nurturing and aspirational family homes for children and young people who cannot live with their birth families.

The service recognises foster carers as highly valued members of the professional team around the child and acknowledges the increasingly skilled role foster carers undertake in caring for children with complex emotional, behavioural, developmental and health needs.

Our vision is to develop a Skilled and Supported group of Foster Carers which means:

- Children are cared for by foster carers who are well trained, well supported and appropriately matched to meet their needs.
- Foster carers are recognised, valued and developed as skilled professionals.
- Matching decisions are informed by children's assessed needs and carers' strengths, experience and skills.
- Foster carers receive targeted training, supervision and support to enable children to achieve positive outcomes.
- Children experience stability, permanence, belonging and positive relationships.
- improving outcomes for children through relationship-based and trauma-informed care.

The child's welfare, safety, wishes and feelings remain central to all aspects of service delivery.

Strategic Priorities and Sufficiency – Children, Young People and Education

In line with the values and priorities set by the Council, the fostering service's aim is to work in partnership with children in care, parents & colleagues across the Council and with other agencies to ensure that children in care have the same opportunities as all children within the borough. This is achieved by offering placement choices so that children are matched to a carer who can then be supported in meeting their needs.

The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the center of their care. Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

Croydon Fostering Service is committed to ensuring that Croydon children are with foster carers who are in or around Croydon unless their needs would be best met

further afield. We continue to invest resources in increasing placement choices and the quality of in-house provisions. The service works closely with children's services within social care to meet the needs of children and with foster carers to continuously improve and develop the service.

Croydon's intentions are focused on developing a skilled, diverse and sustainable fostering workforce capable of meeting the increasingly complex needs of children and young people. This includes continued investment in the recruitment and retention of foster carers, developing specialist fostering provisions including emergency fostering arrangements, step down from residential provision and remand, parent and child offers, which are underpinned by improved foster carer training, workforce development and enhanced support including therapeutic interventions from our in-house clinical service.

Croydon has invested in developing a more competitive fostering offer through, improved training and support offers, mentoring and reflective support arrangements, the development of local fostering hubs, enhanced fostering fees, conditions and specialist payments, council tax reimbursement and retention bonuses for eligible foster carers.

This significant investment aims to help Croydon provide:

- Sufficiency of foster homes
- Local foster homes
- Recruitment and retention of experienced carers
- Specialist fostering provision
- Reduction of IFA use
- Provide services in the in the family first context

The Croydon Fostering Service actively embraces innovation and has already embedded a number of the reforms and practice developments now being suggested or promoted nationally through the Government's fostering reform programme. The service has developed relationship-based and trauma-informed approaches to practice, strengthened peer support through Horizon Hubs and foster carer networks, promoted co-produced recruitment and training materials, expanded therapeutic and multidisciplinary support around foster families, streamlining the transfer process and using technology in the recruitment of carers.

Croydon's practice also reflects the national direction of travel towards stronger support networks around foster carers, improved placement stability, greater delegated authority and trusted relationships, flexible support arrangements, and improved regional collaboration. The service continues to modernise practice to ensure children experience stable, nurturing foster homes close to their communities, whilst ensuring foster carers feel valued, skilled and supported in their role.

The service is committed to recruiting, maintaining, supporting and training foster carers from a wide range of diverse backgrounds. The diverse needs of Croydon's children and young people in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, disability and religion require the service to address these issues with foster carers during the assessment process and after approval, and to be supported to meet these needs and feel

supported in relation to their own identity.

Named Persons

Registered Person and Fostering Service Agency Decision Maker: Leana Ebanks Head of Service for Specialist Services.

Fostering Panel Agency Decision Maker (ADM): Dawn West, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Registered Manager: Khalil Campbell, Service Manager, Fostering Service.

Qualifications and Experience

All senior and middle managers are qualified social workers and are registered with Social Work England.

All Social Work Managers and Social Workers hold social work qualifications and are registered with Social Work England and have relevant experience working with children and families.

Organisation and Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Croydon Council's Children, Young People and Education Directorate. The Head of Service for Specialist Services is responsible for the fostering Service.

The Fostering Service and its social workers are responsible for fostering arrangements and management of the assessment, recruitment, support, supervision and development of applicants and approved foster carers.

The current structure of the Fostering Service is designed to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services' National Minimum Standards, The Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance relating to the delivery of Fostering Services.

There are seven teams within the Fostering Service, led by the Fostering Service Manager. Three supervision and support teams for foster carers, a foster carer recruitment team, Family and Friends assessment team, family and friends post order support team, private fostering and the Fostering Panel.

The fostering recruitment team is the first point of contact for people who are thinking about becoming a foster carer for Croydon. They screen potential applicants and, where relevant, go on to carry out the necessary assessment and training.

The supervision and support teams provide support, supervision and development to Croydon's approved foster carers, with managers taking lead responsibility for key practice areas, for example, foster carers' support groups, continuous professional development training and mentoring.

In addition, the team has access to a clinician from the Clinical Service, who offers direct consultation to staff and foster carers, along with training and workshops to help carers reflect on children's behaviour and consider their own response in

managing this.

The 'adolescent worker' who was introduced to the Fostering Service to work across all teams has had a positive impact on supporting young people and their carers and is now a permanent feature of the service.

Their aim is to assess individual needs and risks presented inside and outside of the home, focusing on strengths and reducing harm by engaging in and working with adolescents and their families/carers. The adolescent worker is providing targeted interventions including mentoring and supporting positive changes, with an objective of achieving stability in their homes and building positive relationships with their carers and extended networks.

As outlined above, there are two Family and Friends teams based within the Fostering Service, one focusing on the assessment of family and friend's (kinship) carers and the other on post-order support. The assessment team carries out the majority of the Regulation 24 assessments for temporary approval as foster carers. They also complete Kinship assessments using the CoramBaaf Form K.

The terms 'family and friends, connected person' and 'kinship carer' are used interchangeably in Croydon and they are defined as a relative, friend or other person connected with a child. These assessments are to determine an individual's suitability to provide long term or short term care to a child.

The Fostering Service has a staffing establishment of:

Service Manager: 1
Team Managers: 6
Assessing Social Workers: 10
Supervising Social Workers: 16
Homefinding Officer: 1
Adolescent Worker: 1
Post Order Support Team Social Workers: 3
Private Fostering Social Workers: 1
Marketing Lead: 1
Recruitment Officer: 2
Fostering Panel Advisor: 1
Fostering Panel Administrator: 1
Service Coordinators: 8

Performance Improvement Consultant

Sitting within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service are practice improvement consultants (PICs). The PIC linked to the fostering service supports it to maintain high-quality, child-centred practice by providing challenge, reflection and quality assurance aligned with the Statement of Purpose and statutory guidance. Through audits, learning reviews and workforce development activity, the role strengthens consistency and supports the ongoing development of Croydon's "Skilled and Supported" fostering model, improving outcomes for children and young people.

Services provided:

The fostering teams provide a range of fostering services:

Task focused or short-term foster carers who provide homes for children and young people at the point of need and in accordance with their care plan, either to return to birth family or to move to a permanent home.

Permanent or long-term foster carers who make a commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach independence.

Kinship Foster carers are foster carers approved to look after a specific child or children. These carers are usually family members or friends who knew the family, child or children before they became looked after by Croydon.

During 2026/2027 the fostering service will continue to develop a “Skilled and Supported Fostering Service” model.

This reflects the service’s recognition that foster carers undertake increasingly complex work and require high quality training, supervision and professional support in order to meet children’s needs and maintain stable foster homes.

The service has expanded its fostering offer to include:

- specialist foster carers for children with complex needs
- development of emergency fostering provision
- parent and child fostering provision

The Fostering Task

The task of Croydon Council Fostering Service is to secure and maintain high quality fostering provision that safeguards children, promotes stability and enables children and young people to achieve positive outcomes within safe, nurturing and supportive family environments.

The fostering service recognises that foster carers undertake an increasingly skilled and complex role caring for children with a wide range of emotional, behavioural, developmental and health needs. The service is therefore committed to ensuring foster carers are appropriately recruited, assessed, trained, supported and developed throughout their fostering journey.

The fostering task includes:

- Working in partnership with the Children in Care Council and the Croydon Foster Carers’ Association.
- Recruiting, assessing and approving a diverse range of foster carers able to meet the needs of Croydon children and young people, including specialist, emergency, parent and child and connected persons carers.
- Promoting fostering within Croydon through recruitment campaigns and co-produced recruitment materials developed alongside foster carers, children and young people.
- Undertaking robust, transparent and child-focused assessments of

prospective foster carers in accordance with fostering regulations, National Minimum Standards and statutory guidance.

- Supporting the timely transfer of experienced foster carers from other fostering providers through proportionate assessment pathways which recognise existing fostering experience whilst maintaining safeguarding oversight.
- Using the MySkills Assessment framework to identify the strengths, experience and development needs of foster carers and to inform matching, workforce development and specialist fostering provision.
- Working in partnership with children's social workers, homefinding services and partner agencies to identify foster homes which best meet children's assessed needs and promote stability.
- Providing foster carers with high quality supervision, support and reflective practice opportunities to enable them to safely care for children and manage increasingly complex needs.
- Delivering a comprehensive training and development programme including trauma-informed practice, safeguarding, exploitation awareness, therapeutic parenting and specialist fostering pathways.
- Supporting stability through early identification of support needs, targeted intervention and access to specialist support services including clinical consultation and adolescent support workers.
- Facilitating regular foster carer reviews, Personal Development Plans and ongoing assessment of fostering capacity and suitability.
- Delivering a programme of initial and on-going in person and virtual training for foster carers.
- Support and training in completing the Children Workforce Development Council Standards for Foster Carers (TSD);
- Promoting children's health, education, identity, relationships and emotional wellbeing and ensuring children's wishes and feelings remain central to planning and decision making.
- Supporting foster carers to work collaboratively with birth families, professionals and wider support networks in the best interests of children and young people.
- Providing fostering support services including out-of-hours advice, mentoring arrangements, support groups, reflective spaces and peer support opportunities.
- Contributing to placement planning, care planning meetings, safeguarding processes and permanency planning for children and young people.
- Investigating concerns, complaints and allegations in line with safeguarding procedures and statutory guidance whilst ensuring foster carers receive appropriate support throughout such processes.
- Developing placement sufficiency and reducing reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies and residential provision through the continued development of Croydon's in-house fostering offer.

The fostering service remains committed to developing a skilled, supported and professionally respected fostering community that places children's safety, wellbeing and long-term outcomes at the centre of all aspects of practice.

Procedures and processes for recruiting, approving and reviewing

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The fostering service follows a two-stage assessment process in line with fostering regulations.

The service is committed to ensuring that recruitment and assessment processes are:

- robust
- transparent
- child focused
- proportionate
- timely

The fostering service has implemented a sophisticated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to strengthen and streamline the recruitment journey for prospective foster carers. The system manages enquiries from multiple sources, including digital campaigns, referrals, events and direct contact, ensuring that all enquiries are captured and responded to promptly. It enables enquiries to be categorised according to factors such as level of interest, stage of the journey and individual circumstances, allowing communication and engagement to be tailored appropriately.

The CRM supports effective relationship management by helping the service maintain regular contact with prospective carers, keep enquiries “warm”, progress applicants efficiently through the process, or appropriately close enquiries where required. The system manages the full recruitment pathway from first point of contact through to foster carer approval, improving consistency, oversight and accountability.

In addition, the CRM enhances reporting and analysis capabilities, enabling the service to measure the effectiveness of recruitment campaigns, identify trends and make informed decisions. This has resulted in greater efficiency, improved responsiveness and significant time and cost savings.

The fostering service has also introduced a proportionate assessment pathway for experienced foster carers transferring from other fostering agencies or local authorities.

This enables the service to:

- recognise previous fostering experience
- avoid unnecessary duplication
- improve timeliness of transfers
- increase fostering sufficiency
- reduce delay and disruption for children already placed with transferring carers

All transferring foster carers continue to undergo fostering panel consideration and full safeguarding checks.

Croydon Council Fostering Service is committed to the co-production of recruitment and promotional materials with foster carers, children and young people, recognising the value of lived experience in shaping authentic and meaningful fostering recruitment campaigns.

The service believes that foster carers and children are best placed to describe the realities, challenges and rewards of fostering and therefore actively involves them in the development of recruitment materials, information events, training and promotional activity.

This co-produced approach supports the service to provide realistic and transparent information about fostering and recruit carers who are aligned with the values and expectations of the service.

It ensures recruitment campaigns reflect the diversity of Croydon's communities and promotes fostering through genuine lived experiences and relationships.

The service recognises that co-production improves the quality, authenticity, sensitivity and effectiveness of recruitment activity.

The two staged approach, known as Stage One and Stage Two are followed to support applicants to find out more about fostering and to assess their suitability to care for children looked after and become registered foster carers.

Stage One

Includes undertaking a range of statutory and reference checks and offering preparation training.

Stage Two

Involves the in-depth assessment, also known as the Home Study.

Interested applicants can find out about fostering by telephone, completion of an online application form, visit Bernard Wetherill House or attend one of the frequently held information sessions held at the Town Hall and online. Details of this process are described in the Croydon Information Pack for Foster Carer Applicants which is available online on the Croydon Website, www.croydon.gov.uk/fostering. The Croydon Fostering Service also has a dedicated phone number (**0300 222 2112**) and an email address: iwanttofooster@croydon.gov.uk.

Information Meeting

All enquirers are invited to attend an information meeting run by fostering social workers and current foster carers who can discuss their fostering experiences.

The purpose of these sessions is to provide people with basic information about fostering, explain what Croydon Council is looking for and outline the preparation and assessment process. At the meeting, details of attendees are recorded, and feedback is sought to support continued development of the service and to help evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment methods.

Initial Telephone Assessment

This is completed by one of the assessment Social Workers to gather more details from applicants, establish their current circumstances and to provide them with more information about fostering for Croydon. When there is the potential to progress further, an assessing social worker will undertake an initial home visit to gather more

information about the applicant and to provide them with further details. If this is possible for the service and the applicants, they are invited to submit their application which triggers the start of Stage One.

Fostering Skills Group Training

The main purpose of the groups is for training and to provide more details about the role and tasks of fostering. Direct information is provided by way of presentations and DVDs; there are small and large group discussions and exercises, and applicants are encouraged to participate fully in the discussions through case studies.

The training and groups are co-led by a Social Worker from the fostering team and experienced foster carers with important input from the CiC in the training and assessment process. An important secondary purpose is evaluation and applicants are informed at the beginning that the facilitators' observations will form part of the assessment process. Applicants may also be counselled out at this stage as the groups will encourage them to explore their own motivation, strengths, and abilities to foster, helping them to decide whether fostering is right for them.

Statutory Checks and References

The Fostering Service provides administrative support in managing all statutory checks, medicals and DBS checks. The Service will take appropriate action on DBS disclosures as soon as possible and before they are presented to the Fostering Panel.

Written references are required from three personal referees who must be interviewed by the assessing social worker. A report attached to the Form F should give details of these interviews, including the worker's assessment of the references.

Other checks include:

- The applicants' employer (continuity of employment must be addressed and any gaps investigated)
- Previous partners
- The applicants' children's school
- A full medical history
- Evaluation of financial stability
- Safeguarding and Criminal Records (DBS checks).

Regulation 26(5) prohibits the approval of any person as a prospective foster carer where they or any member of their household is known to have a conviction or caution for specific offences. All offences must be brought to the attention of the Panel chairperson and the Fostering Service Manager who will decide whether or not to proceed with the assessment. This also concludes stage one of the assessment process.

The Assessment of Foster Carer applicants using objective, robust, fair, and transparent criteria.

All applicants are assessed by an individual process to establish their suitability to be registered as a foster carer, in accordance with Regulation 26 and 27. The Foster

Carers' Report (Form F or Form K for Kinship assessments) will be used to record the assessment and the format for assessment interviews will normally follow the guidelines. Applicants are encouraged to engage fully in the preparation of the assessment, including providing evidence and completing certain sections themselves where possible.

As well as the general areas covered in the Form F guidelines all assessments must cover the following specific issues:

- Health, including use of alcohol and tobacco.
- The applicant's own background and attitude to issues of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity.
- Any issues of concern identified from statutory checks or referee interviews.

Under the Fostering National Minimum Standards, the expectation is that prospective foster carers' completed reports will be presented to the Fostering Panel within eight months of application. However, within Croydon the aim is to achieve this within a four-month timescale.

The completed Foster Carers' Report (Form F/Form K) is shared with the applicant(s), who will retain a copy. If applicants are unhappy with any of the content of the report the assessing worker should seek first to deal with this by negotiation. If this is not possible the applicants are invited to submit their own comments in writing for presentation to the Fostering Panel. All applicants are expected to attend panel.

All Prospective Foster Carers' Report (Form F/Form K) are quality assured by the recruitment team manager or Fostering Panel Advisor; the Form F/Form K must also be signed by the assessing worker and the applicant(s).

The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel is chaired by an independent person who ensures that the panel is able to fulfil its quality assurance function free of undue influence. The Panel is constituted from a central list in line with fostering regulations and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. The Panel usually meets three times a month or, as and when required, and is supported by a panel adviser and administrator.

The statutory functions of the panel are:

- To consider applications for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable or not to become a foster carer and to recommend the number, age and gender of children to be placed.
- To consider the first annual review of the foster carer and other subsequent annual reviews that are referred to it.
- To ensure the assessments undertaken by the assessor are balanced and of sufficient quality.
- To advise and monitor the effectiveness of procedures. To offer advice and make recommendations on any other matter or cases referred to panel by the Fostering Service.
- Consider Standard of Care issues and make recommendations as necessary.
- Consider matching of children with foster carers where the plan is for

children to remain in long term foster care.

- Decisions are made by the Fostering Panel's 'Agency Decision Maker' after considering the recommendations of the panel.

Presentation of Assessment Report to the Fostering Panel

The assessing social worker must attend the Fostering Panel to present the prospective foster carer's report. Applicants are expected to attend the Panel. The Panel will make one of three recommendations:

- Recommend to the Agency Decision Maker approval of the applicant as a foster carer.
- Recommend to the Agency Decision Maker that the applicant is not approved as a foster carer.
- Defer - ask for further information on any relevant matter.

Foster carer applicants are given written information explaining the panel process and are positively encouraged to attend. Their feedback is sought as Croydon and the Panel are committed to continuous learning and seek to consider any developments and improvements they may need to make. The feedback is collated and considered by the Service and Panel yearly.

Applicants Not Approved by Panel

The Agency Decision Maker will write to all applicants whose applications were not recommended for approval by the Panel and will advise the applicants of their qualified determination. The letter will give the reasons for this and advise the applicants of the various appeal routes available including the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Family and Friends Assessment.

Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) 2010 provides for the temporary placement of a child with a relative or friend who is not an approved carer for a period of up to sixteen weeks. If the child is to remain beyond sixteen weeks, a further eight-week extension under Regulation 25 is sought by attendance at the fostering panel.

Before the temporary approval expires the carer must be approved under Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. Immediate placements under Regulation 24 may only be made provided that prior to placement:

- the carer and all other persons in the household over 18, have been interviewed;
- the accommodation has been inspected;
- information has been obtained about all other members of the household;
- the carer is a relative or friend or other person connected to the child (a friend being normally defined as someone previously known to the child and a connected person someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity);
- notification in writing setting out the terms of the approval, followed by a written agreement made between the carer and the Local Authority covering

the matters set out in schedule 5 to the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; and

- The authority is satisfied that the placement is the most suitable way of performing their duty under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989. The child's social worker will complete a referral form, initiate DBS and other checks and refer the matter to the Fostering Service. The Family & Friends Assessment Team Manager will then allocate a social worker to carry out a Regulation 24 assessment of the friend and family carer with a view to seeking specific approval at the Fostering Panel within sixteen weeks. In exceptional circumstances temporary approvals can be extended for up to twenty-four weeks.

Immediate or emergency placement by the Local Authority with a connected person

The Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) requires a local authority to seek first to place a child looked after with a relative, friend or someone connected to them. This requirement is strengthened by the Public Law Outline, which requires local authorities to show that they have considered family members and friends as potential carers at each stage of their decision-making process.

A child who is placed by the Local Authority with a family member, friend or connected person, will be a Child Looked After. A Child Looked After is a child or young person up to age of 18 years who:

- Birth parent(s), or anyone having Parental Responsibility, has asked the LA to care for them on their behalf. The child is 'accommodated' under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, or
- Is subject to a Care Order, including an Interim Care Order, under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

Criteria for making a Regulation 24 placement

When an immediate or emergency placement is required, it can only be considered under Regulation 24. Although the determining factor in the placement being made is that it is felt to be in the child's best interests, the Local Authority must be satisfied that those who will be caring for the child will be able to prioritise and meet their needs and will work in partnership with Croydon and other professionals. Therefore, an assessment is carried out prior to the child being placed.

Approval of a child being placed with a connected person

The assessment is considered by the manager of the placing team in conjunction with the relevant Service Manager. The potential carers' assessment is presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for fostering, who will consider whether to grant temporary approval as foster carers for 16 weeks only. The substantive assessment is to be completed by the Family and Friends team and presented to the fostering panel within 16 weeks. The ADM will again consider the panel's recommendations and all other relevant documents in considering whether to approve.

If the assessment is not completed within 16 weeks, temporary approval can be

extended for up to 8 weeks by the ADM following presentation to the Fostering Panel.

An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of fostering

Croydon Council Fostering Service works to the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy, which is available on the internet <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/Equality-Strategy-2023-2027.pdf> .

The Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the assessment and recruitment process. Applicants wishing to be approved as foster carers will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation or disability and on the basis of being able to parent and to meet the needs of children looked after.

Foster Carer Annual Reviews

The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011, Regulation 28 requires that carers be reviewed at least once a year. A review can be held at other times if there has been a significant change in circumstances or if concerns arise.

The review considers the foster carer's previous year of fostering and makes recommendations about their continued fostering registration. Reviews are carried out in the carer's home and are chaired by a fostering independent reviewing officer (FIRO), who will consider the recommendation of the social worker and will make their own recommendation based on the evidence in written reports and the discussion held in the review meeting.

All registered foster carers in the household must attend the review meeting.

The views of children, their social workers, independent reviewing officers, birth parents and the fostering family will be sought in the annual review.

The foster carer agreement, and health & safety checks, Safer Caring plan and MySkills assessment will be completed annually. DBS and Medical checks are updated every third year however the carers are expected to make an annual declaration regarding the status of their health.

The first review is presented to the Fostering Panel and then every three years thereafter.

Continuous Professional Development and the My Skills Assessment Framework

Croydon Council Fostering Service is committed to ensuring that foster carers are supported to continuously develop their knowledge, skills and confidence throughout their fostering journey. The service recognises that fostering is an increasingly complex and skilled role and that foster carers require ongoing opportunities for learning, reflection and professional development in order to meet the changing needs of children and young people.

A comprehensive programme of continuous professional development is provided to foster carers through a blended model of:

- face-to-face training
- online learning
- workshops and reflective practice sessions
- mentoring and peer support
- specialist training pathways
- multi-agency learning opportunities

The fostering service continues to strengthen its workforce development offer through closer partnership working with clinical services, the Croydon safeguarding partnership, Family Hubs, education services and other specialist teams.

All newly approved foster carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDs) for Foster Carers within their first year of approval. The TSD standards support foster carers in developing the core skills, knowledge and values required for the fostering role and provide an important foundation for ongoing professional development. Foster carers are supported to complete the TSD standards through supervision, mentoring arrangements, workshops and guidance from supervising social workers and experienced foster carers.

Foster carers are expected to complete a **minimum** of:

- 30 hours of training and development within their first year of approval
- 20 hours of training and development in subsequent years

Training compliance and development needs are reviewed regularly through supervision and annual reviews.

Each foster carer has a Personal Development Plan (PDP), which is reviewed annually and used to identify:

- training completed
- future learning objectives
- specialist areas of interest
- progression opportunities
- support and development needs

The PDP supports foster carers to plan their professional development and enables the service to ensure carers continue to develop the skills and knowledge required to meet the needs of children and young people placed in their care.

Continuous professional development is closely linked to the MySkills Assessment framework, which has been embedded across the fostering service as a core tool for supervision, review, matching and workforce development.

The My Skills Assessment framework enables foster carers and supervising social workers to identify areas of strength and experience, development needs, specialist skills, and training priorities

The framework supports reflective practice and enables foster carers to evidence their development and professional growth over time.

The fostering service also uses information gathered through the MySkills Assessment framework to understand skills, capacity and training needs across the fostering service as a whole. This enables the service to:

- identify gaps in specialist provision
- inform recruitment priorities
- shape future training programmes
- develop specialist fostering roles

The MySkills Assessment framework works alongside the “MyNeeds Assessment” used for children and young people. This enables the fostering service to compare a foster carer’s assessed skills, experience and strengths with the assessed needs of a child or young person across a range of domains including emotional wellbeing, behaviour, identity, relationships, education and independence skills.

This approach supports a more needs-led and strengths-based model of matching and enables the service to identify where a foster carer is well matched to meet a child’s needs, where additional support or specialist intervention may be required, targeted training opportunities and possible strategies to strengthen placement stability and improve outcomes for children.

The use of MySkills and MyNeeds together supports more informed placement planning, improves understanding of support requirements and assists the service in developing a fostering workforce capable of meeting increasingly complex needs within family based settings.

Introduction of Skilled and Advanced Foster Carer Levels

As part of Croydon Council’s ongoing transformation and investment in fostering services, the fostering service has introduced a new skills and progression framework for foster carers. This includes the introduction of Skilled, Advanced and Specialist fostering levels designed to better recognise the increasingly skilled nature of fostering and the complexity of children’s needs

The previous fostering payment structure did not fully reflect the level of skill, resilience, training and professional contribution required of foster carers. The new framework has therefore been developed to:

- recognise and reward foster carers’ expertise and commitment
- improve retention of experienced foster carers
- encourage continuous professional development
- strengthen placement stability and outcomes for children
- improve Croydon’s ability to recruit experienced foster carers
- develop specialist fostering provision within the borough

Skilled Foster Carers

The Skilled level is the core fostering level for approved foster carers and reflects carers who are developing their fostering experience, skills and confidence through ongoing training, supervision and practical experience.

The Skilled level recognises that all foster carers undertake important and skilled work in caring for children and young people.

Advanced Foster Carers

The Advanced level recognises foster carers who have demonstrated enhanced skills, resilience and experience in caring for children and young people with more complex needs.

To qualify for the Advanced level, foster carers must have a minimum of two years fostering experience, complete the required advanced level training, demonstrate enhanced capability through the MySkills Assessment framework

Specialist Foster Carers

Croydon has also introduced a Specialist fostering level for carers who undertake highly specialised fostering roles. This includes carers trained to care for:

- Horizons hub leaders
- children on remand
- parent and child placements
- children with life limiting conditions

Support, Supervision and Development of Croydon Foster Carers

All carers will have an allocated supervising social worker who is responsible for ensuring an appropriate level of support and supervision is offered for foster carers to successfully undertake their work in supporting, meeting the needs and improving the outcomes for children in their care.

Supervising social workers will ensure that carers have access to necessary support, advice and training to carry out their roles and responsibilities. This will vary from carer to carer, but will include all of the following:

- Complete a Foster Care Agreement with all Carers (Regulation 27 (5) Schedule 5 of Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011).
- Ensure the carer has an adequate supply of equipment.
- Ensure that carers have access to an up-to-date copy of the Croydon Foster Carers' Handbook.
- Ensure that carers are provided with up-to-date details of procedures and policies, including the Complaints and Suggestions Procedure, payment procedures and the service's insurance policy for carers.
- Carers automatically become members of the Croydon Foster Care Association and receive membership to Foster Talk.
- Visit the carers on a six weekly basis and whenever reasonably requested by carers or as deemed necessary by the agency to support and supervise a carer (visit frequency may vary if the carers are on hold).
- Make at least one unannounced visit per annum.
- Carry out an annual health and safety inspection of the carer's home, or when the carer moves or has major work carried out on their home, and this is considered at each annual review.
- Ensure that the carer is making appropriate and regular recordings as stipulated by Croydon Fostering Service. These should be reviewed by the Supervising Social Worker prior to visits.
- Carry out an annual review of the carer's approval.
- Identify, in conjunction with the carer, any training needs/core requirements and identify for training profile purposes ways in which these may be met.
- Attend reviews, conferences and other planning meetings in respect of

- children placed when requested by the carer or the IRO.
- Investigate any complaint by or against carers' standards of care in accordance with relevant procedures in a timely manner.
- Ensure that lines of communication between the carer and the child's social worker are open and effective.
- Respond promptly to telephone calls and correspondence from the carer.
- Keep a record of their visits, share these with foster carers in a timely manner and record these on CRS.
- Supervising social workers ensure that visits are arranged in such a way that there is adequate time to address the carer's own role and development in addition to any visits that may be necessary in respect of individual children.
- Carers' children should also be provided with opportunities to discuss their experiences of fostering.
- Supervising Social Workers must also undertake direct work with Looked After Children on at least every third visit in order to obtain their views and understand their experience of being cared for within the foster home.

Horizon Hubs and Peer Support

Croydon has developed the Horizon Hubs model, Croydon's fostering hub approach based on the principles of an "extended family" model of fostering. The Horizon Hubs were introduced in response to feedback from foster carers regarding the importance of timely, responsive and relational support and the impact that isolation and lack of support can have on placement stability, foster carer retention and the experience of children.

The Horizon Hubs bring together a group of fostering households around a highly experienced central foster carer, supported by a liaison supervising social worker and access to systemic and therapeutic support. The hubs are designed to replicate an extended family network and provide practical, emotional and peer support to foster carers and children in a responsive and needs-led way. Horizon Hubs also include Kinship carers who may be foster carers or Special Guardians.

Support available through the Horizon Hubs includes:

- peer support and mentoring
- social activities and relationship building
- emergency and planned respite support
- sleepovers and short breaks
- crisis support
- reflective and systemic group supervision
- informal advice and guidance
- opportunities for children and young people to build supportive peer relationships and social networks

The hubs have supported children and young people to reduce social isolation, build positive relationships and experience a greater sense of belonging and community.

The fostering service also recognises that peer support and relationship-based interventions are important and spreads significant value of experienced foster carers supporting and mentoring other carers. The development of Horizon Hubs forms part of Croydon's wider ambition to develop a skilled, connected and professionally

supported fostering community.

Croydon's ambition is to continue expanding and strengthening the Horizon Hub model over the coming years as part of its wider sufficiency and stability strategy.

Foster Carers' Charter

The Foster Carers' Charter was produced by the Fostering Network with support from a range of organisations including the Department for Education, ADCS and FosterTalk.

The charter represents a commitment on behalf of the placing authority in its role as the corporate parent, the Fostering Service and the foster carer to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care.

Financial Allowance Policy

Approved Croydon foster carers are paid a weekly amount, which is made up of a fee and a maintenance element. The fee element is paid to the carers as recognition of the skills, responsibilities and experience that they bring to the fostering task. The maintenance element covers the costs of caring for the child/children in their care.

Upon approval all foster carers are eligible for a setting up grant of up to £500 [subject to the provision of receipts]. In addition to the normal payments for caring for foster children, foster carers are paid an annual holiday payment. All children in placement receive birthday, festival and holiday allowances.

Connected Persons

Foster carers approved as connected persons (family and friends' carers) receive a weekly maintenance allowance. The Council also pays the remuneration element to all connected persons carers who have been approved and have completed the full preparation training. Connected persons are also entitled to the setting up payment.

Newsletter

A Newsletter, edited by members of the fostering team, is produced on a monthly basis to keep carers informed of:

- Advice on practice
- Changes to policy
- General information on fostering
- Staff movements within the fostering team
- Information from the Children in Care Council
- Recruitment Activities

Croydon Foster Carers Association

There is an established Croydon Foster Carers' Association that is run and managed by the foster carers through a management committee. The Fostering Service Manager and other team managers attend meetings with the association and the annual general meeting.

The Croydon Foster Carer Association is a key partner in consultations on policy and other changes within the fostering service.

Support Groups

The Croydon Foster Carers Association (CFCA) meet monthly and invite speakers from a range of council services and external organisations.

The Men's support group meets bi-monthly. The aim of the group is to provide a safe, accepting & supportive environment to share personal experiences, share and explore the unique challenges faced by male carers.

The Enhanced Mentoring offer is primarily to provide extra support to our new (Kinship) carers, some carers in assessment and newly approved foster carers. It is led by Supervising Social Workers and it is planned to recruit a foster carer with significant experience to join the facilitators.

The connected (Kinship) carers support group, which is led by a supervising social worker and provides a safe and supportive environment for this cohort of carers. This is in acknowledgment of the unique challenges faced by Kinship carers. A support group for connected carers undertaking assessment has been introduced.

The reflective spaces enables carers to come together to reflect and share ideas/experiences about their fostering role. This offers additional peer support to discuss scenarios where they may have felt stuck/not sure how to manage a challenging situation and offers them ways of approaching situations differently. As with all groups, this offers an opportunity to meet other carers and develop support/respite networks in the Croydon fostering community.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers

Where there are complaints about the standards of care provided by a foster carer these are managed by the service. If there are allegations of inappropriate behaviour by foster carers, these are managed through the procedures for allegations agreed by Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP). These procedures are in line with the Department of Education guidance outlined in "Handling Allegations of Abuse made against Adults who Work with Children and Young People". The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) process is also involved in the management of allegations against foster carers.

Complaints from Foster Carers

Complaints about the service are dealt with under the Corporate Services Complaints procedure, which can be accessed via Croydon Council website or by calling Tel: 0208726 6000 ext 44010 or at complaints@croydon.gov.uk

Registration Authority

The address & contact telephone number for the OFSTED Registration Authority is:

Ofsted

Royal Exchange Buildings, St

Anne's Sq. Manchester M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk

The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually and is available to view on the Croydon Website.

The Statement of Purpose is available to anyone working for the purposes of the fostering service, with children who may be in our care including families, professionals and legal guardians, and anyone wishing to become a foster carer.

The information contained in this Statement of Purpose can be made available in alternative formats: large print, braille, audio tape or disk. We can also translate the information into other languages.

Please contact:

Croydon Council Fostering Service: 4th
Floor, Zone C, Bernard Weatherill House 8
Mint Walk, Croydon
CR0 1EA.

By Telephone: 0208726 6000 ext 44183.

By email: fosteringenquiries@croydon.gov.uk

On the website: www.croydon.gov.uk/fostering

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