

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF GREENWICH

FOSTERING SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2019-2020

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1.0 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require all fostering services to provide a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and the services and facilities provided.

The fostering service must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector of Ofsted and make a copy available on request to staff, any approved foster carer or prospective foster carer, any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service, and the parent of such a child. A

children's guide summarising the statement of purpose, the representations and complaints procedure, and contact details for the Chief Inspector of Ofsted should also be made available to any child (subject to their age and understanding) placed by the fostering service and to their foster carers.

1.1 Aims and objectives

All children need security, stability, love, and a strong sense of identity and belonging.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to providing safe, caring and professional foster care for every child within the borough that is in need of a foster placement.

Royal Greenwich prides itself on supporting and promoting a 'one community' ethos in its relationship with foster carers: we recognise the professionalism of our different roles and the importance of working together as *One community – One purpose*.

The fostering service celebrates the diversity of gender, abilities, language, sexuality, ethnic origins, faiths and cultures that make up the borough's vibrant communities and believes that every child and adult should be respected and valued. The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to the promotion of equal opportunities whilst keeping the safeguarding of children and young people at the forefront of any decision making.

1.2 The aims of the fostering service

The Royal Borough of Greenwich strongly believes that every child should have the opportunity to grow up in their family of origin. Where this is not possible, consideration will always be given to identifying a family member, friend or connected person, such as a teacher or child minder, who can care for the child. The fostering service supports family and friends carers to help them safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

The fostering service aims to offer placement choice where a foster placement is necessary to ensure that children are matched to a foster carer who can promote their cultural, faith and linguistic needs, and care for them well. This is achieved through recruiting, training and supporting carers who are representative of the diversity that exists in the borough.

The fostering service works closely with colleagues in the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure that any child placed in foster care is given a secure base, which provides them with a caring experience that meets their needs, provides opportunities to succeed and promotes their wellbeing. We will support carers to provide care which improves the life chances of children and young people, helping them be healthy, to stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and facilitate them to achieve economic wellbeing.

If no placement is identified within the child or young person's family or social network then a best possible matched foster care placement will be sought by our Personalized Commissioning Team (PCT) which meets the child's needs,

1.3 The objectives of the fostering service

All decisions made in relation to children and young people will have their best interests as the paramount consideration. The priority for the Royal Borough of Greenwich is to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded and their welfare promoted.

Children and young people will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about any decisions that affect them. Their views will be sought and taken into account and where they cannot be acted upon, a clear and honest explanation will be given.

Children and young people are supported and assisted to become independent, to reach their full potential and play an active part in their community and society as a whole.

Where a decision is made that a child or young person cannot safely return to the care of their birth parents then alternative plans to achieve permanence for them - to provide children with the stability and security of a suitable permanent home – will be made in a time-scale appropriate to the child's needs.

Contact between children and young people and those important to them, including immediate and extended family, and friends, will be actively promoted as long as it is in the best interests of the child.

The birth parents of looked after children will be encouraged and supported to retain links and remain involved with their children's lives unless this is contrary to the identified needs of the child and/or prohibited through a legal order.

Services to children and young people, and foster carers and their families, will respect their race, culture, language, any disability, sexuality and faith.

Children, young people and foster carers will be provided with information on the complaints procedure of the Royal Borough of Greenwich and supported to speak out if they are dissatisfied with the service or support they receive.

Foster carers will be supported to provide a secure base for the children they care for. They will receive regular supervision to enable them to care for a child to the best of their ability and provided with the advice, information and training to enable them to do so.

2.0 SERVICES AND FACILITIES PROVIDED

2.1 Range of placements

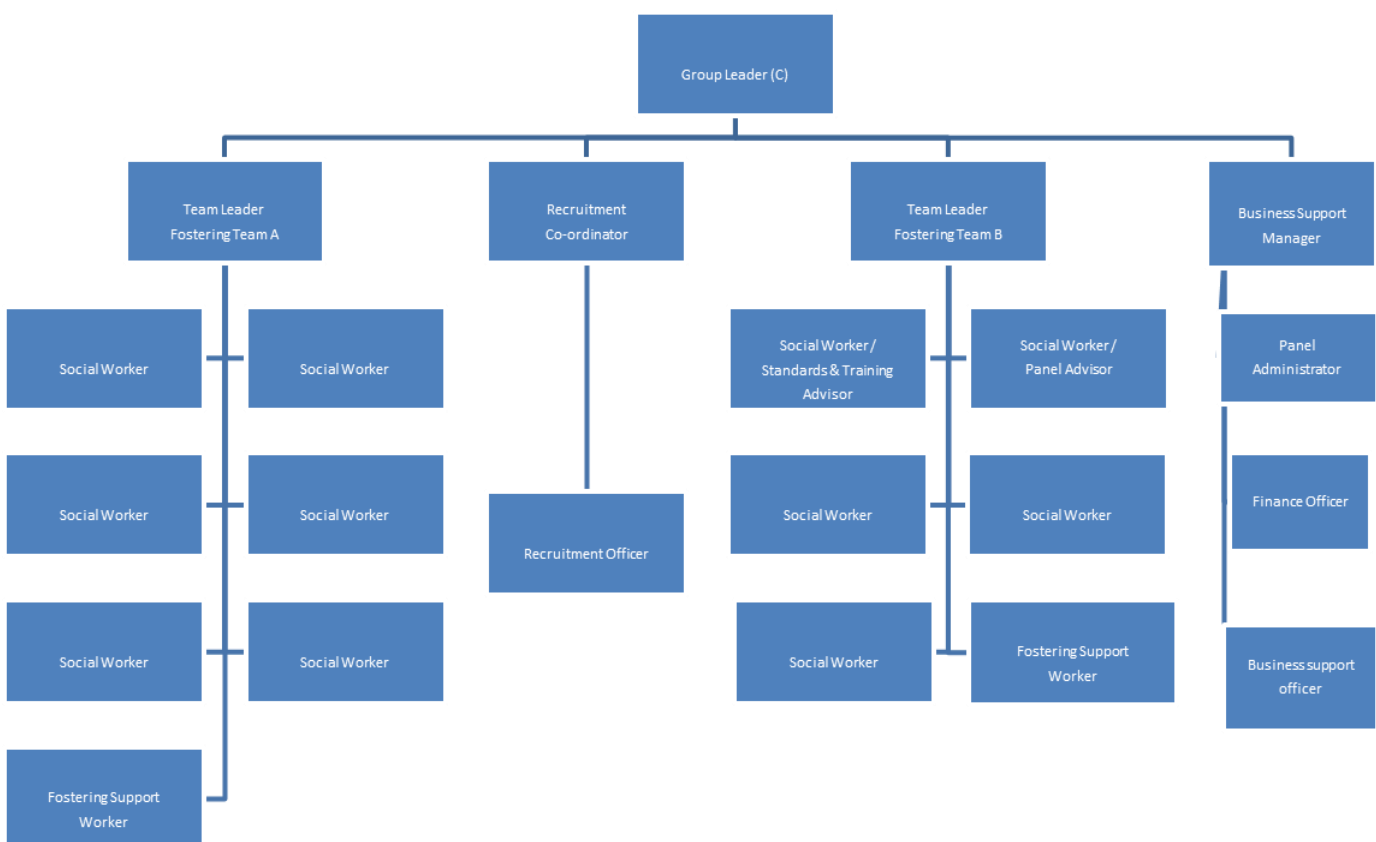
The fostering service provides foster carers to meet a range of needs. These include:

- *Career foster carers* who provide short term placements for children and young people whose Care Plan is either to return to their birth family or to move to a permanent placement.
- *Career foster carers* who provide permanent or long-term foster care, making the commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach independence.

- *Emergency Scheme foster carers* who provide immediate placements for children and young people who come to attention outside of normal working hours.
- *Parent and Child foster carers* who provide placements for parents and their child(ren) whilst the parent is being assessed to care for their child(ren)
- *Respite foster carers* who support the parents or foster carers through offering day care, respite placements and short breaks.
- *Family and friends foster carers* who are foster carers approved to look after a specific child or young person who is known to them.

2.2 Management structure and configuration of the fostering service

See structure chart below:



2.3 Fostering Service

The Permanence Service Leader with responsibility for fostering services (and Registered Fostering Manager) reports to the Head of Service for Permanence and Care Leavers. The Permanence Service Leader (Group C), Ishara Tewary, has an Honours degree in Social Work, an Honours degree in Organisational Psychology, a Master's degree in Leading and Managing in Health and Social Care and a Practice Teaching Award. Ishara manages the two fostering social work team leaders, the recruitment co-ordinator and the business support manager (who constitute the Fostering Service Leadership Team).

All social work staff are registered social workers and are fully checked prior to their employment in accordance with Towards Safer Care employment guidance.

The two social work team leaders are Ana Caldararu and Bianca McKay, who supervise teams of 7 and 6 staff, a mixture of social workers and support workers, respectively.

The team leaders have divided between them particular lead responsibilities for the oversight and development of the following areas:

- Operation of duty
- Private Fostering
- Training Support & Development Standards
- Annual foster carers' training programme
- Family and Friends care
- Foster carers' support groups
- Fostering Support Task Group
- Greenwich Foster Carers' Association
- Fostering Panel
- Special Guardianship Support Services / Adoption Support Fund
- Fostering Service documentation
- Participation
- Mockingbird family model

Both team leaders share joint-responsibility in supporting recruitment activity and identify team members to participate in recruitment events and pre-approval activity.

Supervising social workers carry a mixed case load of supervision of approved foster carers (both career and family and friends) and also have at least one fostering assessment each at any time.

Caseloads, benchmarked against high-performing services and designed to deliver best practice support and therapeutically aware supervision, reflect differing circumstances and individual responsibilities but would be expected to fall within the range of 12-15 fostering families with the average being of 13 families.

Three senior social workers have specific responsibilities that influence the nature of their workload: one Standards and Training Advisor, one Fostering Panel Advisor and one Mockingbird Family Model Liaison Officer

The fostering support workers share the provision of support to Special Guardians (allocated named Special Guardians in the first six months of the orders being made) and conduct Private Fostering Regulation 8 monitoring visits. They can also be called upon to provide some immediate 'hands-on' support where needed for fostering placements that become fragile.

The fostering support workers also share responsibility for being the main contacts for day-to-day duty matters with the support of a named supervising social worker each day to call upon where necessary to conduct a Regulation 4/7 Private Fostering assessment, or a Regulation 24 temporary approval of connected person assessment.

The Recruitment Coordinator manages all recruitment activity: publicity, marketing, information events; coordinates telephone follow-up to enquirers and attendees of Information

Events; and arranges initial home visits conducted individually by either themselves, the Recruitment Officer or foster carers' group.

The Recruitment Officer is supervised by the Recruitment Coordinator.

The Recruitment Officer supports the recruitment activity, collates performance data and ensures timely follow up to all enquirers.

2.4 Business support team

The service is supported by a dedicated Business support team, who provide the core support to the service, including: making foster carer and Special Guardian payments, data capture and performance evaluation, activities reminders, RBG (and other LA) statutory checks, Fostering Panel support and minute taking, maintaining training and development records, and systems/workflow developments.

2.5 Fostering Support Task Group

A self-organised task force of carers, provide support and respite, including taking children to contact and supervising contact sessions. Two experienced foster carers coordinate this and referrals are made via supervising social workers and fostering duty.

2.6 Striving for outstanding – innovation

RBG Fostering Service aspires to provide an excellent child-focused service and to deliver best practice with foster carers to achieve excellent outcomes for children.

The Service is outward looking and interested in learning from others – and is supportive of research collaboration.

Mockingbird Family Model

Royal Greenwich Fostering Service was successful in being selected as one of only two London local authorities (along with six other delivery partners across England) to join The Fostering Network in a partnership bid to the Department for Education (DfE) Innovation Programme (January 2015) to pilot the pioneering Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) approach to foster care in the UK.

The decision to join in with the partnership bid was predicated upon improvements already underway that reflected the dynamic and innovative improvement journey of our Fostering Service; and it built on earlier cross-services work on Delegated Authority and revision of Placement Plan.

Our MFM pilot constellation has firmly embedded itself as a positive addition to our Fostering Service and an exemplary means of providing emotional as well as practical support when needed to young people and foster carers without the delay and waiting on agreement from SWs that can often be the case with other arrangements. We have further expanded and now have four constellations within Greenwich.

We are pleased to have received agreement for further innovation to develop a MFM constellation within the borough with close links to our “outstanding” children’s home, in order to help reintegration into family care, provide “extended family” relationships for young people in residential care, and facilitate Staying Close options. We are also seeking to develop a constellation outside of London for young people who require placements some distance from the borough for their safety and to break gang affiliations.

Fostering Potential

During 2018-19 Royal Greenwich joined the Fostering Potential programme led by the Fostering Network and funded by The Sir John Cass Foundation and the British and Foreign School Society. The overall aim of the programme is to raise the educational outcomes of children in our care by increasing foster carers’ knowledge and confidence in their role as ‘first educators’.

The programme is based on an educational peer-support network, delivered by local Education Champions, who are experienced foster carers. The Education Champions work closely with foster carers and education professionals to increase foster carers’ skills and confidence in their role as educators and to share practical tools to support children’s learning and development. They also work with children and foster carers to identify an individual target relating to extra-curricular activities, participation or widening horizons.

This work is supported by a national virtual network (for everyone concerned with the education of children in care) and a series of free virtual events (webinars and other media) led by expert advisors to the programme.

Intended outcomes

- Children will report increased confidence levels in Maths and English;
- Children will achieve or exceed their personalised end-of year targets in Maths and English;
- Children will achieve a personal target relating to extra-curricular activities, participation or widening horizons;
- Foster carers will report increased levels of skills, confidence and knowledge relating to the education of children in our care;
- Education professionals will gain a better understanding of best practice and the latest research to improve the education of children in our care.

Since it’s induction, 9 foster carers have been trained as education champions and currently 4 are actively working in this role. The active champions were each matched with 3–4 foster carers.

Tech Safe

TechSafe is a digital online safety project to enable foster carers and social workers to better support children and young people to be safer online. Children and young people are at the heart of coproducing online safety awareness. It aims to reduce the risk of sexual exploitation for the Children in our Care.

Together, in consultation with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Virtual School, we developed a series of workshops to run over a one year period with foster carers and the children in their care, at no additional cost to Greenwich. The programme provides for our

children, foster carers and Greenwich staff to design and produce digital resources to support foster carers.

Following an amazing collaborative working partnership between children, young people, foster carers and professionals, the TechSafe Fostering App has been completed and was launched in July 2019.

This project has delivered tailor made training sessions empowering the RBG fostering community, and has reached across the breadth of the Team Around the Child – it has refreshingly included the children’s voice and opened up doors for a closer ‘working together’ between carer and child/Social Worker and Carer/Carer and Supervising Social Worker; it is hoped that it has created greater transparency and opportunities for growth in learning about online safety. The training the Champions will enable on-going support for those in need of it.

3.0 FOSTER CARERS

“Foster carers have a challenging and key role to play within a foster care service. They need skill, knowledge, expertise, self-awareness, commitment and the ability to work as part of a team, providing a high quality, effective service to vulnerable children. To undertake this role successfully it is essential that their contribution to improving outcomes for looked after children is appropriately recognised and acknowledged, their status respected and their levels of authority clearly defined so that they can give children in their care a full experience of family life, safeguard them and help them to grow and reach their potential.”

[The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services]

The fostering service recruits foster carers who represent the diverse backgrounds of the children and young people requiring foster placements. The selection, assessment and approval of foster carers is carried out under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and associated statutory guidance *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services*, and in accordance with the *Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)*. It is undertaken in a manner that is respectful, fair, objective and transparent whilst keeping the welfare of looked after children to the forefront.

3.1 Recruitment

On receiving an enquiry from a potential foster carer, an information pack is sent out. This includes details of the different types of fostering and the assessment process.

Within two weeks the potential foster carer will be contacted and, if they wish to proceed, invited to an Information Event (monthly events are held, alternate Saturday mornings or weekday evenings) – potential carers are given the opportunity to view a DVD of RBG foster carers, a power point presentation and the opportunity to meet RBG foster carers to discuss their interest. A home visit will be arranged usually jointly with an approved RBG foster carer. If the enquirer, and the Local Authority, wishes to continue to the assessment Stage 1 an application form must be completed.

Potential carers will be requested to give consent for the following:

- A criminal records check with the Disclosure and Barring Service for all members of the household over the age of 17
- Medical check from the applicants' GP, which is forwarded to the Fostering Panel's medical advisor
- For personal and employer references to be taken up.

3.2 Assessment of career, respite, short term and permanent foster carers

A Stage 2 assessment will be carried out by a suitably qualified social worker using the Fostering Network competency documentation. This will usually commence and run concurrent with the Stage 1 assessment. Interviews will be carried out with the applicant(s) and all other members of the household. Additional information will be collected which includes:

- Local Authority checks for the current and previous home addresses
- Contact with other statutory agencies, for example, the schools attended by the applicant's children
- Contact with the most recent employers or all previous employers if the applicant has previously worked with children or vulnerable adults
- Interviews with personal and family referees
- A file review of all fostering agencies the applicant has previously applied to or been approved by
- A Health and Safety check of the applicant's home and any other accommodation regularly used, e.g. holiday caravan
- Interviews with proposed support network.

Applicants must attend a 2-day Pre-approval Foster training course and 7 evenings' preparation training. Children of applicants (if of an appropriate age) will also attend a half day workshop as part of the pre-approval training. The Fostering Service or the applicant can make a decision at any time during the assessment process not to proceed with the application. If the assessment is terminated before the completion of Stage 1 (or within 10 days of receipt of all required information) then there will be no referral for consideration at Fostering Panel. If the assessment is terminated after the completion of Stage 1 and whilst Stage 2 is still underway then a short report will be presented to Fostering Panel and the applicant invited to attend.

3.3 Assessment of Family and Friends foster carers

Where a child is to be placed in immediate circumstances with someone other than a parent or person who has parental responsibility, the carer, where the Local Authority considers it appropriate, should be granted temporary fostering approval under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

The assessment must fulfill the requirements of Schedule 4 of the 2010 regulations. Where temporary approval is then sought the report must be presented to the Group Leader to consider granting temporary approval as a local authority foster carer.

If the child is to remain with the carers a full fostering assessment must be carried out and presented to the Fostering Panel within 16 weeks (or at most within a further 8 weeks if an extension of temporary approval is granted under Regulation 25).

The full assessment of carers with temporary approval or of those connected with whom the child is not already placed, is carried out using a separate format to that used for career, respite, short term or permanent foster carers, but the same checks and references are undertaken. Applicants and family and friends carers who have temporary approval must attend the minimum 3 day preparation course, which is held 3 times a year.

3.4 The Fostering Panel process

The assessing social worker will complete a report using the Fostering Network format. The report is shared with the applicant, other than information gathered from third parties (such as the GP) who do not wish for the information they have given to be disclosed. The report should be presented to the Fostering Panel within 8 months of the original application – though in practice we endeavor to do so within no more than six months.

Applicants are invited to attend the Fostering Panel and may bring a supporter if they so wish. The supporter will not be able to contribute to the meeting. The Fostering Panel makes recommendations as to the suitability of applicants to be foster carers and the ages and number of children that can be placed with them. Information on the Fostering Panel, its role and membership, is given to the applicant prior to the meeting.

3.5 The Decision Maker

The Panel acts independently of the Fostering Service and can only make a recommendation. This is forwarded to the agency decision maker who is the Permanence Head of Service. The agency decision maker must make a decision within 7 working days of receiving a final copy of the panel meeting minutes and the Fostering Panel's recommendation. The decision will be verbally communicated to applicants within 2 working days and a letter confirming the decision will be sent out within a further 5 working days (National Minimum Standard 14.9).

3.6 Appeals against the decision of the Decision Maker

The Decision Maker, on receiving the final minutes and recommendation of the Fostering Panel, can make one of the following decisions:

- To approve and define the terms of approval (if any) such as the number or ages of the children to be placed
- Not to approve
- To defer a decision and request further information

If an applicant wishes to appeal a decision there are two routes that can be followed. An appeal can be made using the Royal Borough of Greenwich own appeals process or through the Independent Review Mechanism. Information on how to appeal a decision is included in the letter sent to applicant's following presentation to the Fostering Panel.

3.7 Support of approved foster carers

All Royal Greenwich foster carers are enrolled as members of *The Fostering Network* following approval and a supervising social worker is allocated. Their role is to supervise and support the carer and their family; to be their 'secure base' to assist the carer to provide a secure attachment base for their looked after child. They will ensure that the delegation of authority as set out in the child's Placement Plan is appropriate and ensure that all regulations and guidance relating to the care of any looked after child are understood and met and that the Care Plan for the child is followed.

Foster carers must sign a Foster Care agreement once approved before they can be considered to accept looked after children. Additionally each foster carer household will have a safer caring policy.

The supervising social worker (SSW) will support the carer through monthly visits and regular phone calls. These contacts will be recorded and the supervision reports shared with the carer. Unannounced visits are made to the fostering household at least twice a year.

The SSW may also attend looked after child reviews and any other relevant meetings for any children in placement. The SSW will monitor and support the foster carer and, where appropriate, carry out additional visits or identify training required. Additional support is available through the *Fostering Support Task Group* - a group of experienced foster carers who can, in agreement with the SSW, provide short term assistance to other foster carers by, for example, providing daycare or taking a child to or from contact.

Carers are also encouraged to attend the range of regular support groups and are introduced to the *Greenwich Foster Carers Association*. Newly approved carers are invited to a new carers support group, facilitated by an experienced carer during their first few months fostering for RBG.

Contact with a qualified fostering social worker is available 24/7 via an emergency phone service.

3.8 Training and development

All foster carers will have a Personal Development Plan (PDP), which will inform their individual training and learning programme.

An annual training programme is produced and carers are expected to attend any training identified as necessary by the SSW. Training covers a wide range of topics relevant to caring for someone else's child and all courses are linked to the Training, Support and Development Standards, which all carers must complete.

Family and friends foster carers of a child who is known to them must complete the Standards within 18 months of approval; and career, respite, short term and permanent carers must complete the standards within 12 months of approval. Additional workshops and support are provided to help carers achieve a 'Certificate of Successful Completion.'

Carers will be supported to continue their personal development through involvement in recruitment campaigns, training and peer mentoring.

3.9 Annual review of fostering households

An annual review is completed. It is an opportunity for the carer and their family to reflect on their fostering practice during the previous year and identify any training or development needs. The initial annual review is presented to the Fostering Panel. Reviews are then considered for presentation to Panel thereafter at three yearly intervals; unless a significant change of approval terms is being considered, or there is a concern regarding the standard of care or an investigation has been carried out following an allegation, where then the annual review report will come to Fostering Panel.

Annual reviews need to include feedback from the:

- The social workers for any children cared for during the year
- Child or young person in placement and those previously cared for in the year and their parents
- The carer's own children living in the family home
- The Independent Reviewing Officer for the children cared for in the year.

3.10 The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel is comprised of 10 members, with a Panel Adviser and Panel Administrator and it acts independently from the Fostering Service. The members include an Independent Chair, an Elected Member and members with care experience and expertise in health, social care and education.

As well as considering applicants' suitability as foster carers, the Panel gives recommendations on foster carer annual reviews and long-term matches of children.

Panel Members consider the wishes and feelings of looked after children and young people and may make recommendations on other matters relating to standards and regulations.

The Panel also provides quality assurance and objectivity. This means Panel can challenge practice and standards that potentially fall short of the fostering regulations, National Minimum Standards and guidance.

4.0 COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Complaints

These may relate to any service provided to a child or young person in a foster placement, or be more specifically about the foster carer.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has a formal complaints procedure, which is shared with all children and young people in care, their parents, and with foster carers.

The Fostering Service responds to complaints without delay; and actively seeks views from children and through the voice of the Children in Care Council.

Complaints may be about foster carers and may relate to a range of issues with different levels of concern, for example from a safeguarding allegation (which will be reported to the responsible delegated officer immediately) to one about caring practice or level of care. All issues are initially addressed by a manager in Children's Services. Where an investigation is required, it is conducted by a nominated individual, whilst the fostering service continues to offer supervision and support. Where the matter is not seen as an allegation, it is likely to be addressed by the supervising social worker.

A complaint can be made by a child, care leaver or an adult who has requested or received a service from Royal Greenwich Children's Services. A foster carer can make a complaint or representation on behalf of a child or themselves. There is a formal staged process of complaint management.

Complaints are often due to misunderstandings and in the first instance should ideally be discussed with the Fostering Service, social worker, their manager or the Independent Reviewing Officer for the child.

We keep a record of complaints and their outcomes. We discuss these within the service and aim to learn from matters raised.

A formal complaint can be made to the Children's Services Complaints Manager who can be contacted at:

The Woolwich Centre
35 Wellington Street
Woolwich
SE18 6HQ
Tel. No. 020 8921 3082

A leaflet is available on:
childrens.complaints@greenwich.gov.uk

4.2 Foster carers can also contact

The Fostering Network

87 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA
t. 020 7620 6400
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Ofsted

Inspection reports for the Local Authority are available on: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The address of the registration office is:

National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Building
St Ann's Square
MANCHESTER
M2 7LA
Tel: 083456 404045

The Local Government Ombudsman

This is a free independent service that investigates complaints relating to councils.

Local Government Ombudsmen

The Oaks
No 2 Westwood Way
Westwood Business Park
Coventry
CV4 8JB
Tel. No. 024 7682 000

The Family Rights Group

They provide information on challenging decisions and making complaints.

Family Rights Group
The Print House
18 Ashwin Street
London
E8 3DL
Tel. No. 0207923 2628