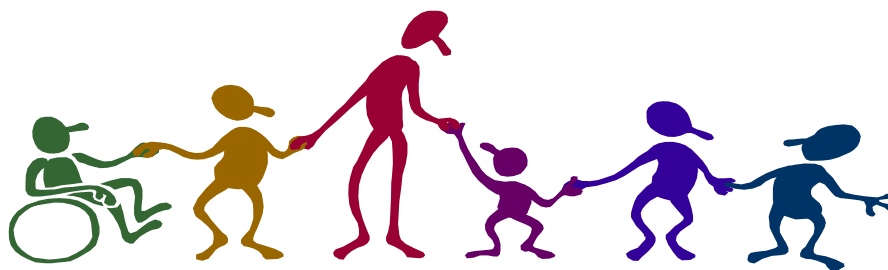


Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

2021



Merton Children in Care and Permanence Service

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Merton Fostering Service is registered with Ofsted and complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Minimum Standards (2011) (NMS)
- 1.2 The Fostering Service compiles an annual statement of purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole. This statement of purpose relates to the fostering service provided by the London Borough of Merton. The statement of purpose is formally approved by the Lead Member for Children, Schools and Families and it is reviewed annually.
- 1.3 The statement of purpose is available to anyone working for the fostering service, to children who may be placed in foster care, their parents and legal guardians and to anyone wishing to foster.
- 1.4 The statement of purpose is also available on the Merton website at www.merton.gov.uk/fostering

2 Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

- 2.1 In Merton we take our corporate parenting role seriously. We want to make sure that all our children in care and care experienced young people benefit from our efforts to achieve best value from the investment Merton receives from the government and local people.
- 2.2 We believe that:
 - All children are entitled to grow up as part of a stable and loving family
 - Where it is safe for them to do so, children should be brought up by their birth family
 - Children should be matched, wherever possible, with families who reflect their race, culture, language and religion. These factors have to be balanced against the need to be in a permanent home, within a reasonable time frame
 - Team work in partnership with colleagues across services is important to ensure that delays in achieving permanence are minimised
- 2.3 This means in Merton:
 - Children and young people's best interests come first. The best interests of children are our paramount consideration and we will canvass their views, wishes and feelings.
 - All children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills supporting them to lead a successful life.
 - Services will be built around children's needs and will be inclusive, accessible and welcoming.
 - A sense of identity is important to a child's wellbeing. We recognise,

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- positively value and promote each child's ethnic origin, cultural background, race, religion, language and sexuality
- The particular needs of children who have a disability or who have complex needs are fully recognised and taken into account.
- 2.4 In addition:
- Decisions on use of resources will increasingly be taken jointly.
 - Resources will be pooled wherever it makes sense to do so.
 - Services will be jointly commissioned and provided where it is in children's interests to do so.
 - We will integrate service delivery when this demonstrates added value.
 - We will work with local communities, networks, groups and organisations that have a key role in promoting the well-being of children and providing services and support to them and their families.
 - We aim to provide services/interventions which are evidence based and provided by skilled workers.
- 2.5 The fostering service seeks to provide a range of homes (including placements for parent and child) to meet the diverse needs of and improve outcomes for children and young people looked after by Merton. We will do this by ensuring that children are suitably matched with fully trained, skilled and well-supported foster carers able to provide a high quality of care.
- 2.6 In Merton the fostering service is divided into two teams; the Fostering Recruitment and Permanency Team which undertakes the recruitment and assessments of foster carers, and the Fostering Supervision Team, which undertakes support and supervision of foster carers once they are approved. Both teams are located within the Children in Care and Resources Service.
- 2.7 We are passionate about continuous improvement of our services for children in care. In adhering to the National Minimum Standards, we want them to achieve the following outcomes:
- their wishes and feelings to be heard
 - to feel able to tell us what is working for them and what is not
 - to be living in a place where they feel safe
 - to know that we will look after them if they run away and are concerned for their safety
 - to maintain contacts with their birth family where it is safe for them to do so
 - to be able to form and maintain appropriate friendships
 - to achieve their maximum potential in terms of educational achievements
 - to have access to suitable leisure opportunities and to achieve their full potential in any areas where they excel.
 - to be both physically and emotionally healthy
 - to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace
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2.8 In order to achieve these outcomes we will

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time for them and in the best possible homes
- Recruit and assess foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of children in care, including parents with children
- Run an effective and efficient fostering panel and decision making process
- Ensure that we match children with carers who meet their assessed needs and support those carers to do this.
- Listen to our children and young people and act upon any concerns raised by them
- Work closely with colleagues from other services including health and schools to support our children's needs
- Have an annually updated statement of purpose and children's guide.
- Ensure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in continual professional development
- Provide learning, development and continual professional development for foster carers.
- Supervise and support carers to the highest standards
- Respond to allegations and suspicions of harm according to the procedures, supporting our children and young people so that they feel safe whilst any investigation is being carried out.
- Pay foster carers the appropriate allowances and fees and on time
- Support young people to remain with their former foster carers in a 'staying put' arrangement until they are ready to move to independent living.

2.9 The teams are committed to improving practice and service delivery and to recruiting and retaining quality permanent staff to facilitate this. All staff are provided with a thorough induction and support from experienced and skilled managers to promote these values and to work within the Council's Equalities policy. Staff are also provided with the Whistleblowing policy as part of their induction which makes clear the responsibility of all staff to report areas of poor practice.

3 Service Delivery

- 3.1 In Merton our fostering service is divided between two teams.
- 3.2 Our Fostering Recruitment and Permanence Team
- Recruits and assesses a range of carers in sufficient numbers to meet the diverse needs of children looked after.
 - Has an ongoing recruitment campaign using all available media aimed at attracting new carers who can meet the needs of children in care of all ages and ethnicities including those with a disability
 - Undertakes viability and special guardianship assessments.
 - Delivers training to fostering applicants (Skills to Foster).
- 3.3 Our Fostering Supervision Team:
- Maintains a pool of trained, skilled, competent and well supported foster carers whose skills, abilities and competencies are reviewed on an annual basis
 - In collaboration with the Access to Resource Team, they provide a high level of support and supervision to all foster carers regardless of the type of fostering they are approved for so that carers are able to deliver the quality of care required to meet the needs of children in care.
 - Identifies foster homes for children which are able to meet their particular needs including those related to their gender, race, culture, religion, language, disability; and where any gaps in matching occur, highlight the need to address these by provision of additional support
 - Delivers training courses to approved carers that meet the requirements of the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers (TSD) and also where appropriate to provide specialist training required to meet the needs of the children and young people placed in their care.
 - Provides respite foster care services for young children with a disability and to support in-house foster carers needing a break from time to time.
 - Ensures that children in care have full and proper access to health, education, social, and vocational services so that they are not disadvantaged by being in public care
 - Ensures that children in care are protected from harm and poor standards of care
- 3.4 The London Borough of Merton aims to provide a full and comprehensive range of fostering services, that is consistent with best practice and national and departmental standards and requirements. Both teams involved in the fostering service work together to ensure seamless transition of carers and/or children between teams.

4. Name, address of managers, qualifications and experience of staff within the service.

- 4.1 Sadi Atim is the Ofsted registered Fostering Manager. There are two managers with responsibility for the Fostering Service in Merton

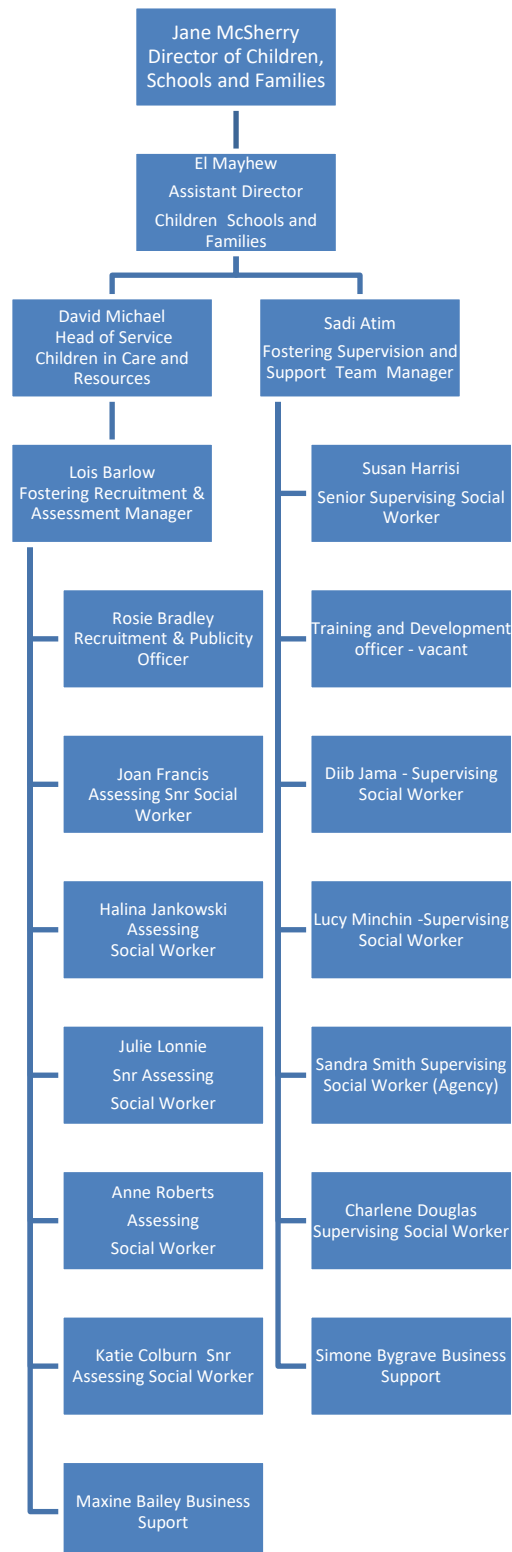
Sadi Atim (Registered Manager)
Fostering Supervision team Manager
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London Road
Morden SM4 5DX
0208 545 4286
sadi.atim@merton.gov.uk

The Fostering Supervision Team Manager has a social work qualification and a Diploma in Management Studies Level 4

Lois Barlow
Fostering Assessment and Recruitment Manager
Civic Centre
London Road
Morden SM4 5DX
020 8545 4643

The Fostering Assessment and Recruitment Manager has a social work qualification.

4.2 Organisational structure of the Fostering Service



4.3 Staffing:

4.3.1 The Fostering Supervision Team comprises:

Role	Length of SW Qualification
Team Manager	Qualified 1994
Senior Supervising Social Worker FT	Qualified 1998
Supervising social worker FT	Qualified 2015
Supervising social worker FT	Qualified 1999
Supervising social worker FT (Agency)	Qualified 2000
Supervising social worker FT	Qualified 2005
Foster Carer Training and Development Officer (0.6)	Vacant
Business Support FT	N/A

4.3.2 The Fostering Assessment team comprises:

Role	Length of SW Qualification
Fostering Assessment and Recruitment Manager	Qualified 1990
Snr Assessing social worker FT	Qualified 2010
Snr Assessing social worker FT	Qualified 1997
Snr Assessing social worker FT	Qualified 2011
Assessing social worker FT	Qualified 1982
Assessing social worker FT	Qualified 1997
Assessing social worker FT	Qualified 1997
Publicity and Recruitment officer 0.5 FTE	N/A
Business support FT	N/A

- All social work staff in the Fostering Assessment and Recruitment and Fostering Supervision teams are DBS checked every three years.
- All social workers have a social work qualification as a minimum and are registered with Social Work England, the Regulator for social workers.
- In keeping with the Council's commitment to invest in its staff, learning and development opportunities are made available for staff each year. Social workers have access to internally provided and external courses. Social workers are regularly supervised and have an annual appraisal that includes consideration of their personal and professional

development.

- 4.4 The service is monitored at a strategic level by the use of key performance indicators for children's services. The Children's Services Senior Management Team meets regularly to review and monitor performance in all areas of work against local and national targets. This helps to ensure the best outcomes are promoted for children who are unable to live within their families.
- 4.5 The Lead Member for Children, Schools and Families, the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Board receive reports covering the activity and development of the service. Reports are also presented to the Children, Schools and Families Directorate Management Team (DMT) on a regular basis and as requested.
- 4.6 As required by the regulations, quarterly reports about the service are presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 4.7 The Fostering and Permanence Panel play a key role in quality assurance. Panel members complete feedback forms regarding the quality of information provided in reports and reviews.
- The Panel is independently chaired
 - Merton's panel advisor (who is positioned within the Quality Assurance and Practice Development Service), quality assures the reports to be presented to the Panel and the Panel gives independent feedback to the Agency Decision Maker.
 - Six monthly reports are expected from the Chair of the panel to the Agency Decision Maker.
- 4.9 Additional evaluation and monitoring takes place through:
- Learning from disruption meetings.
 - Feedback from prospective carers and social workers
 - Case management and supervision systems.
 - There are annual performance reviews for all staff, setting and reviewing targets that are in line with departmental and team targets and objectives.
 - Each social worker is given regular supervision by the team manager on a regular basis, with a review of tasks, monitoring of targets and discussion of personal development plans and training.
 - The Merton customer care and complaints section maintain records of complaints, their outcomes and compliments.
 - To maintain a high standard of expertise and quality service staff have access to corporate training courses and independently run specialist courses. Social workers also attend joint training with the Fostering and Permanence Panel.

5 The functions of the Fostering service

5.1 Recruitment of Carers

- 5.1.1 The Fostering Recruitment and Permanence Team employs a part time recruitment and publicity officer who is responsible for co-ordinating campaigns to recruit foster carers. These include local press advertising, having a stand at local fairs and shopping centres and radio slots. There is also a designated website where prospective applicants can register their interest in fostering.
- 5.1.2 Some applicants phone in directly to the team and are responded to by an assessing social worker who conducts an initial assessment on the phone and if suitable offers a home visit to progress their application and an invitation to the skills to foster course will be the next step if the applicant is suitable.
- 5.1.3 The service aims to complete the full assessment within 4-6 months. Assessments of connected persons are completed within required timescales and are presented to panel for extension under exceptional circumstances as required in statutory guidance.
- 5.1.4 The strategy for the recruitment of foster carers is linked to Merton's Sufficiency Strategy which looks at the needs and numbers of our children in care (both in the present and forecasting into the future) to identify the range of carers and homes required to meet their diverse needs.
- 5.1.5 All foster carers are recruited in line with National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Regulations. This includes interviews with the prospective carers, household members and the carer's own children, checks with Disclosure and Barring Service, Health, Education and Local Authority and taking up of references. Each applicant is measured against the competencies required for foster carers and the Prospective Foster Carers Report (PFCR) is used to compile the home study. An abridged approved format is used to complete a Connected Person's assessment.

5.2 Approval

- 5.2.1 Following the completion of the PFCR, the report is presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel at the earliest possible date. This should be within 6 months from the date of application.
- 5.2.2 The Fostering and Permanence Panel has an Independent Chair and is made up of independent members, local authority representatives, a Medical Advisor, a Panel Advisor and a Panel Administrator. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker for Fostering. This role primarily sits with the Head or Service for Children in Care and Resources and the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion; however, all Heads of Service within the Children's Social Care & Youth Inclusion Division are designated Agency Decision Makers.
- 5.2.3 Following receipt of the recommendation from Panel, the Agency Decision Maker will make a decision and a letter confirming the decision is sent out to the prospective foster carer.

5.3 Post Approval

The assessing social worker will arrange an introductions/handover meeting with the supervising social worker and the newly approved foster carer. Induction training is also organised for all newly approved foster carers. A foster carer's agreement is signed prior to any child being placed.

5.3.1 Task Based Fostering

The Fostering Service provides a range of approved foster carers who are able to take children within their terms of approval and age range on an immediate or planned basis. Placements will have a clear focus: either working with the child and family and others towards reunification; working with the child, family and others towards preparing the child for permanency whether permanent fostering or adoption; or working with the child, family and others towards independent living (normally where the young person is a teenager at the point of or soon after coming into public care). They and the social workers who support them will be keen to ensure that children placed with them are not in a situation of 'drift'.

5.3.2 Potential carers, through the recruitment process are now being advised that in general the expectation will be that young people in foster care will always have the option to remain with their foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement into adulthood (up to 21 years or, potentially older).

5.3.3 These carers are also called upon to provide an **out-of-hours emergency service** on a rota basis for children and young people who may be received into care outside of normal working hours.

5.3.4 Respite Fostering

These carers provide short breaks primarily at the weekend for children with a disability. Children may be placed with carers one or two weekends a month or one weekend every 6 weeks depending on their needs and those of their family. Additionally, respite fostering is available for foster carers needing a break from caring for children who may have high or complex needs. Respite periods can vary in length from 1-2 days to a block of a week or two.

5.3.5 Permanent

These carers provide permanent care for children and young people who are not able to return to their parents. These children will remain with their permanent carers until they are at least 18 years old with the possibility of staying put post 18. These arrangements are considered by the Fostering and Permanence Panel.

5.3.6 Staying Put

When young people reach 18 years of age, they have the option of remaining with their former foster carers in a Staying Put arrangement.

6 Support and Training

- 6.1 Prospective carers are invited to the Skills to Foster training programme, jointly delivered by the Fostering Assessment and Recruitment team, supervising social workers and experienced foster carers.
- 6.2 The main focus of the Fostering Supervision team is to offer high level of support to foster carers to look after the children placed with them in order to avoid placements breaking down. They will have an allocated supervising social worker who will visit on at least a monthly basis. Visits can be more frequent depending on the needs of the carers and the complexity of the placement. Advice and support is also offered by the fostering team's duty system during working hours.
- 6.2 Outside working hours support is offered by a telephone advice line that operates from 6pm – 1am and this is resourced primarily by members of the Fostering Team. There is also an Emergency Duty Team that operates outside normal working hours which covers the boroughs of Merton, Sutton, Richmond and Kingston.
- 6.3 The Foster Carer's Manual provides in-depth information to foster carers about the fostering service and their role within it. The manual is being reviewed in 2021.
- 6.4 Foster carers are supported financially by the department. The fostering payment scheme is split into two parts; there is the allowance for the child or young person and a reward element or fee for the foster carer. No approved foster carer receives less than the government recommended minimum level of allowances. There are additional allowances available for specific circumstances such as birthday allowances for the children, initial clothing allowances if a child needs clothing when they are first accommodated. Allowances are reviewed regularly to ensure that it adequately covers the cost of fostering and fees are set at a competitive rate in order to attract and retain carers.
- 6.5 There is a support group for all carers that meets regularly and provides an opportunity for foster carers to meet and share common concerns.
- 6.6 There is a very active Foster Carers Association in Merton which gives foster carers a voice in the strategic and operational functions of the fostering service.
- 6.7 Respite is available to all foster carers who are caring for children with high or complex needs.
- 6.8 A training programme for foster carers runs throughout the year and carers are expected and encouraged to participate. There is an expectation that existing foster carers will complete at least six training courses a year. The department places great importance on foster carers maintaining and improving practice through training.
- 6.9 Foster carers are also encouraged to make use of other internal training courses organised by the Merton Safeguarding Children's Partnership to advance their skills and knowledge.

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- 6.10 The Fostering Supervision Team has implemented the requirements of Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers (TSD). All newly approved carers are expected to complete their portfolio within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friend foster carers).

7 Additional Services for foster carers

- 7.1 The Virtual School is part of the Schools Standards and Quality department. They cater for all Merton children in care wherever they are living to ensure that all children in care develop the same educational aspirations and are given the same opportunities and support as children not in care.
- 7.2 They arrange for the provision of home tutors; they offer opportunities for extra-curricular activities, such as music lessons, dance or almost any leisure activity the child is interested in, which will help them develop into confident young people; they track school attendance and educational progress and can be a link with schools and other agencies should carers have unresolved concerns. They also offer training on educational issues for foster carers and are available for general educational support and advice to foster carers, particularly with regard to choosing a school, work experience and choices related to applications for further and higher education and training.
- 7.3. There is a designated nurse who monitors the health needs of children in care. They prepare health care plans for each child in care which gives advice to foster carers and social workers on a range of health care issues.
- 7.4 There is a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) located within the department who work with foster carers, children and young people to address their mental and emotional health issues.
- 7.5 The Council provides an independent advocacy service for children and young people in its care. This is in addition to the Council's complaints process. The advocacy service is delivered by Jigsaw4U.
- 7.6 The Welfare Benefits Officer is based in the 14+ Team and provides welfare benefits advice and advocacy for care experienced young people and foster carers.
- 7.7 The Annual Foster Carers Reception and Awards takes place in the summer and a festive event takes place at the end of the year to recognise and celebrate the contribution made by foster carers. The summer event was not held due to Covid-19 social distancing measures.

8 Annual Review of Approvals

- 8.1 Foster carer reviews are undertaken by an independent reviewing officer, based in the Quality Assurance and Professional Development team.
- 8.2 Foster carers suitability is reviewed on an annual basis where the supervising social worker will assess the performance of the carer over the preceding year. Feedback is sought from the foster carers, from birth parents, from children placed and the carers' own children, as well as the placing field social workers.
- 8.2 The first annual review is presented to the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews may also be presented to panel if there is deemed a need for it such as a change of circumstance or a standards of care concern.
- 8.3 Where carers are deemed not to be meeting the competencies a report will be written by the supervising social worker either deferring their re-approval until the identified gaps have been remedied or recommending termination of approval. Carers will be able to make written representations and attend the Panel in person if they so desire.
- 8.4 If the Agency Decision Maker qualifying determination states that a carer's approval should cease, the foster carer has 28 days to make further representations to the Panel in writing or in person. In addition, carers have the right to appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

9 Complaints

- 9.1 All local authorities are required to have Complaints Procedures under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and also, where children are involved, under the Children Act 1989.
- 9.2 Merton has a complaints leaflet which is given to all foster carers. This advises service users on how to complain. Merton Complaints and Compliments Procedure is well advertised with leaflets and on the Merton Website at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/complaints> which includes online forms and printable forms for Comments, Complaints and Compliments.
- 9.3 These are also available in
 - [Shqip \(Albanian\)](#)
 - [عربي \(Arabic\)](#)
 - [French](#)
 - [Farsi](#)
 - [Somali](#)
 - [தமிழ் \(Tamil\)](#)
 - [Urdu](#)and can be additionally translated if necessary

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- 9.4 All complaints are logged with the Customer Care and Complaints officer who then monitors to ensure that responses to complaints are within specified timescales.
- 9.5 Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a child protection allegation, this is dealt with under standard child protection procedures.
- 9.6 The Customer Care and Complaints Officer's address is:
- Customer Care and Complaints Officer,
Housing and Social Services Department,
Civic Centre, London Road
Morden, Surrey SM4 5QZ
Tel: 020 8545 3263
- Email: childrensservicescomplaints@merton.gov.uk
- 9.7 Applications to become foster carers, who are not approved by the Agency Decision Maker, are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process are made available to applicants during the assessment process.
- 9.8 Foster carers are aware of their right to contact Ofsted to report any issues with regard to the Fostering service

10 Position Statement as at 31st March 2021

- 10.1 There are 81 fostering households registered as at 31st March 2021 offering a range of placements. This included 71 mainstream households and 10 connected carer households.

11 Equalities

- 11.1 Enquiries are welcomed from the widest range of potential carers who can meet children's needs.
- 11.2 Merton has recruitment targeted at dispelling myths as to who can foster, and targeted at a wide range of applicants including Black Minority Ethnic carers, both with general advertising and editorials within the specialised recruitment strategy.
- 11.3 A range of information is collated regarding enquirers. This is analysed to ensure that service delivery and recruitment is targeting priority needs.
- 11.4 The Fostering Supervision Team works closely with the Children's Safeguarding Teams and the 14+ Team to ensure quality information is collated regarding children's needs when matching with foster carers. This includes information as to individual identity, language, race, culture and religion.

12 Customer feedback

- 12.1 The foster carers' survey invites feedback on the service and on specific topics.
- 12.2 All training sessions with carers are evaluated by attendees who complete a feedback form.
- 12.3 The service provides information for children and young people who are being placed in fostering families. This encourages children and young people to feedback their views about the service and includes information about the complaints procedure.
- 12.4 Feedback is sought at various stages of the fostering processes and practice is changed to reflect feedback when appropriate.
- 12.5 Prospective carers are invited to attend the fostering panel. They are asked for feedback on their experience at panel and regarding the assessment process. This information is used to inform practice and policy.

13 Policies & Procedures

- 13.1 All the Fostering Team's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and carers will reflect this statement of purpose. These are also available on the intranet to all staff and in the Foster Carer Manual for all carers.
- 13.2 In line with Fostering Regulations, the statement of purpose is reviewed annually. This statement of purpose updates and replaces that issued in September 2020


14. Name, address & contact details of OFSTED

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This Statement of Purpose is subject to annual review and endorsement by the Lead Member for Children, School and Families.

Merton Fostering Service
☎: 020 8545 4286

Name	Signed	Date Signature of
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<i>Lead Member for Children, Schools and Families.</i>		20 July 2021
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