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Minutes

Fostering Advisory Committee

8 July 2025 | 10.30am - 3pm

Coram Campus, London

Present (in person)

Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster carer – LA	HAN
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Amber James	The Fostering Network	AJ
Pal Jandu	Camden	PJ
Cara Jones	Foster carer – IFA	CJ
Linda Leeder	Essex	LL
Claire Rogers	Treehouse Care	CR
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	ST (chair)
Ruth Willetts	FosterTalk	RW

In attendance (online)

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster carer – LA	JAB
Sioned Ellis	The Fostering Network	SE
Florence Chiwetu	Independent consultant	FC
Rachel Cole	Black Foster Carers Alliance	RC
Denise Mclean	Chair of CB BWPF	DM
Liz Spaven	Newcastle LA	LS
Natalie Williams	The Fostering Network	NW

Apologies

Sally Barnett	South Coast Fostering	SB
Corrie Biddle	The Fostering Network	CB
Beth Biederman	Luton	BB
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	LBC
Sam Frith-Jones	AFKA Cymru	SFJ
Nazeema Gill	Foster carer – IFA	NG
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	AG
Julie Macer-Wright	Essex County Council	JMW
Victoria Odude	Expert by Experience	VO
Ellie Ott	Researcher - CEI	EO
Steffi Roth	Brighter Futures	SR

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Nicola Smith	Barnardo's	NS
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2B Parents	MTR

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 ST welcomed members to the meeting as chair.

1.2 Members, new members and guests introduced themselves, both in the room and online.

1.3 The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as an accurate reflection of discussions.

2. Equality, diversity and inclusion

2.1 *The Black Care Experience Conference:* 28 March 2026, Manchester

2.2 *Support for neurodivergent foster carers:* HAN raised some struggles that neurodivergent foster carers face, specifically those with ADHD, with regards to training and paper work etc. Local authorities do not have a formal duty of care towards foster carers, who are viewed as self-employed. Recruitment and retention could benefit from more support for carers. CR recognised how a therapeutic model does not always fit with carers (or children) who are neurodivergent, and shared how Treehouse Care are reviewing this approach in order to suit them better. All managers and staff are undergoing training to better understand neurodiversity, in relation to both the families they work with but also their own colleagues. CR emphasised how social work is all about relationships.

2.3 CJ noted how some prospective foster carers have been discouraged by social workers from seeking a formal diagnosis, as this would reduce their likelihood of being approved. Approved foster carers are also reluctant to seek diagnosis, due to a fear of being treated differently by social workers or being deemed unsuitable to care for a child (particularly where medication may be involved). This causes intense anxiety for individuals and their family. This impacts single carers in particular. CJ questioned the extent of foster carer rights against discrimination.

2.4 CR suggested having fidget toys and pads for doodling available in every training session, as well as computer software with a dictation tool. Trainers need to be aware that foster carers may not have a formal diagnosis and feel ashamed or embarrassed about their struggles. Working together to create bespoke strategies for those carers can be hugely beneficial. LS noted the importance of making adaptations for physical disabilities too, as well as having a diverse fostering panel (though regulatory requirements are weak around this). Increasing fees could attract younger panel members (at the beginning of their careers with less savings) who maybe can't afford to take a day off work at the current rate.

2.5 EF is creating a CoramBAAF practice note on supporting neurodiversity amongst foster carers. ST noted how panel attitudes had been altered in the past by CoramBAAF research on approving disabled applicants. EF shared learnings from the CoramBAAF Panel Conference in March, which focused on diversity. FAC to review regulations on panel membership.CR shared information on collecting disability data via the anonymous foster carer register. It was noted that not all neurodivergent people identify as disabled.

Action: Members to please share good practice examples or useful resources with EF to support this work. Volunteers to read the practice note before a final draft is submitted would also be welcome.

2.6 It was suggested foster carer handbooks could be made more accessible by producing interactive online versions and using AI to highlight sections/translate to different languages etc. Equally, printed versions may be more suitable for some people. CR highlighted the importance of language (using 'we'/ 'you'/ 'us' rather than 'the foster carer'/ 'the social worker').

3. Foster Carer shortages

3.1 *Short breaks/staying over (previously known as respite):* CJ shared how Chrysalis Consortium creating a working group to tackle short break issues. It was identified that short break provisions are not designed for modern day fostering; i.e., children being younger and more diverse, and more foster carers having other jobs. JAB emphasised the need for agencies to provide sufficient short break care for disabled children. Promises are made on paper but not followed through with. ST recognised the discrimination between what can be accessed as a foster carer compared to what would be available to a birth family whose child had similar needs. It was suggested this could be a role for Ofsted, to ensure communication between disability and fostering teams.

3.2 Some solutions discussed were:

- Local authorities approaching specialist IFAs that have better resources
- Recruit 'short break only' carers and equip their houses for physically disabled children
- Recognise that short break needs will increase over time and plan for this in advance
- Paying foster carers for outstanding days if full short break allocation not used
- Providing more local authority short break facilities (for both birth and foster families)
- Introducing a mockingbird type model that specifically caters for disabled children (e.g., Oasis in Essex)
- Providing better guidance on managing short breaks (e.g., not expecting foster carers to supply their own short break carers; making sure children arrive with their financial allowance) in a way that supports the wellbeing of children and carers.
- Paying short break foster carers before the child comes to them, not after they leave.
- Forming connections between services, so foster carers can access short break services where they live, as well as with the child's local authority.
- Accessing residential holidays for children whilst foster carers are away, including specialised disability residentials.
- Improve efficiency and quality of handovers by having all information about the child (medical details and support needs, as well as hobbies/likes and dislikes). Providing picture books or letters about short break carers, that the child can see before they go.
- Making short break training more flexible, to accommodate 9-5 jobs.
- Improve quality of training and ensure trainers are experienced/knowledgeable enough to answer questions and cater to different types of fostering.
- Provide foster carers and short break carers with small benefits such as free parking, eye/hearing tests, Blue Light cards etc.
- Arrange for SSWs and child social workers to visit short break homes whilst children are staying
- Bespoke assessment for short-break carers could be considered.

- *Retention:* Don't underestimate the positive impact of small gestures and consistencies and their role in value messaging.

3.3 HAN highlighted how short break carers are being pulled/coerced into full time fostering, either against their will and out of choice. Mockingbird Hub Home carers are being used as short break carers for children outside of their constellations, making them unavailable for those families. RW acknowledged how applicants only interested in short break roles get turned away, as services prioritise return investments on Form F.

3.4 *Weekenders:* Now Foster recruitment campaign. Creates enduring relationships for young people and capacity for short breaks. Focus on younger applicants who have other commitments during the week. LL shared the similar concept of 'independent visitors' who help support children of young people who were in care. This is a volunteer programme, which can be a gateway to foster care (particularly parent and child).

Action: Add quality of foster carer training to a future agenda (and invite DfE).

4. Fostering employment rights

4.1 NW and SE shared a presentation on the employment rights of foster carers, highlighting key court cases and government policy context. Topics raised included fees, short breaks, pensions and a national register.

4.2 Members discussed the following questions:

1. What is the committee's position on the current Oni, Dawkins and Reid case – allowing discrimination and whistleblowing rights for FCs?
2. What is the committee's position on employee and limb (b) worker status?
3. What is the committee's position on Unions having representational rights on panels for FCs?
4. What else do we need to do as a membership organisation to support our members around this issue?

4.3 It was suggested that foster carer employee rights should include:

- A hybrid solution with a new definition, i.e., a mix of employee and self-employed rights
- A national register, allowing flexibility of movement between agencies
- A pension (ISA) with incentives (e.g., rewards for longevity of service)
- Professional status within the social work system, with acknowledgement of skill level
- Injury policies and procedures
- Agency official duty of care towards foster carers
- Introduce a regular wage, including when a child is not in place or during an allegation
- A bespoke approach to the 48-hour working week, with recognition that every family is different

Action: Members to please reach out to The Fostering Network (via ST or GC) if interested in further involvement with this work.

5. Sector Updates

5.1 The revised Form F was published in May 2025 and is now accessible to all CoramBAAF License holders. A recorded briefing session is available on the website, as well as an FAQ document. Work is being done to release the Form F in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

5.2 The new Skills to Foster training is now live. It is entirely digital, created by foster carers, with the voice of children throughout. Accessible via a Fostering Network licensing scheme and monthly open access courses are available.

Action: Members can contact ST if their organisations would like an individual briefing session

5.3 The Fostering Network's allegations toolkit is in its Welsh translation phase. This is funded by Welsh government and publication is expected by the end of July. ST highlighted the inclusion of an 'information and context exchange' and guidance on thresholds.

6. Any other business

6.1 EF requested volunteers to co-chair this committee with ST.

6.2 Future discussion topics:

- Share Foundation – children's money
- Quality of training for foster carers
- Foster carer employment – recommended solutions for DfE
- Reviewing regulations on panel membership

Date of next meeting: 11 November 2025