coramBAAF
adoption • fostering • kinship

Minutes

Fostering Advisory Committee

11 November 2025 | 10am – 12.30pm

Present

Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster carer, Waltham Forest	HAN (chair)
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	LBC
Florence Chiwetu	BMEPAC rep	FC
Lianne Chorley	Panel Chair, EbE	LC
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	AG
Amber James	The Fostering Network	AJ
Pal Jandu	Camden Council	PJ
Cara Jones	Foster carer, IFA	CJ
Ellie Ott	Centre for Evidence and Implementation	EO
Claire Rogers	Tree House Care	CR
Liz Spaven	Newcastle	LS
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2B Parents	MTR
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	ST

In attendance

Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF

Apologies

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster carer, Nottingham	JAB
Sally Barnett	South Coast Fostering	SB
Samantha Frith-Jones	AFKA Cymru	SFJ
Nazeema Gill	Foster carer, IFA	NG
Steffi Roth	Brighter Futures for Children	SR
Ruth Willetts	Foster Talk	RW

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 HAN opened the meeting as vice chair.

1.2 LC was welcomed as a new member of the committee. Attendees introduced themselves.

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

1.4 Matters arising:

- Members are still invited to share good practice examples, or useful resources, with EF to support the practice note on recruiting and supporting neurodiverse foster carers. Volunteers to proof read are still welcome.
- Quality of foster carer training to be added to a future agenda (DfE to be invited).
- Members are still welcome to contact ST regarding fostering employment rights and/or Skills to Foster training.

2. FAC letter to the Minister

2.1 In anticipation of the imminent fostering reforms, members considered writing a collective letter to Josh MacAlister and the DfE fostering sprint team, highlighting their top priorities in fostering and suggestions for how these could be addressed. It was recognised that DfE are looking for 'quick wins' and tangible action points.

2.2 The main issues identified by members were:

- Transferring foster carers – streamlining the assessment and approval process (Form T)
- Paperwork and administration – hiring non-social work staff to complete non-social work tasks, enabling social workers to spend more time with families. Time is their most valuable resource.
- Foster carer training – introducing a requirement that social workers and panel members complete the same standardised and mandatory training as foster carers, to increase their understanding of the content and reduce contradictory advice being given.
- Improving openness of communication with foster carers regarding agency processes
- Making training available to foster carers before panel
- Home renovations and adaptations to enable foster carers to accommodate more children (particularly sibling groups) and/or be better equipped to support children with disabilities.
- The complexity of enquirers is increasing and the approvals process needs to adapt to this.
- Retirement package – this would improve retention of existing carers by rewarding them for long service, and encourage recruitment of younger carers by providing them with future security. Annual leave and employee benefits also require consideration.
- Affordability and budget limitations – many children are in residential care due to the limited number of full-time foster carers and two-carer households. Higher salaries are required to address the sufficiency crisis, as the cost-of-living impacts recruitment and retention.
- The Mockingbird model does not work for all families, especially those whose children have more complex needs. An alternative model should be considered for those who feel isolated within their constellations, or live in more remote areas.
- Process for removing unsuitable carers would be simplified by a register.
- Education – difficulty accessing school places and educational provisions for children with specific needs. Clarity needed on the role of virtual schools. More support needed for social workers dealing with EHCPs and cross-borders.
- Staying put arrangements need expanding and more foster carers encouraged to enter into them.
- Suggestion of a centralised database for foster carer support and training, to improve consistency and quality across agencies.
- Scotland undertook a National Foster Care Consultation in October 2024, which set the agenda for Scottish government policy. A national register of foster carers will be piloted in the near future.

Action: Members can send Mockingbird feedback to ST and AJ at The Fostering Network. Meetings with the Mockingbird team can be arranged upon request.

Action: Anyone with a particular interest in the national register can contact ST at the Fostering Network, who are doing ongoing work on this with all four governments.

3. Two-minute silence

3.1 Members observed the two-minute silence at 11am, in recognition of Remembrance Day.

4. Regionalisation Hubs

4.1 An interim report on Hub delivery in the North East shows that, due to different systems, there is a duplication of sharing information (i.e., needing to share it twice) in many areas.

4.2 Anecdotally, fostering hubs are not supporting the recruitment of foster carers and seem to have created more barriers. Concerns have been raised around the appropriateness of carers coming through, as well as foster carers moving to different areas due to the LA offer.

4.3 It was thought a more centralised approach, with stronger government leadership, was needed. For example, a national campaign for the recruitment of foster carers, similar to the one implemented in Scotland. Similarly, the recruitment of diverse families lacks sufficient government backing, leaving many organisations without a clear coordinated strategy.

4.4 Members recognised that retention was getting the necessary attention. It was agreed that increased focus on respecting, celebrating, and properly preparing carers would not only improve their experience but also empower more carers to become advocates within their communities, ergo improving recruitment (most effectively done via word-of-mouth).

4.5 Additionally, kinship carers are frequently taken advantage of in relation to financial expectations and lack of appropriate support. It was the experience of some members that kinship carers are often persecuted when allegations arise, even when situations could have been prevented through better preparation, guidance and ongoing support.

5. Equality, diversity and inclusion

5.1 CoramBAAF are asking all Advisory Committees and Practice Forums the same four questions on their experiences of racism and the far right. EF provided an overview of the current political context, before outlining CoramBAAF's intentions moving forward.

1. Thinking about the impact on families - what experiences are you hearing about in your networks?
2. Similarly, thinking about the impact on practitioners/workers - what experiences are you hearing?
3. Are there any initiatives or support in your networks that would be helpful for others to know about? Potentially to counter and challenge the narrative, but also to support families?
4. Is there anything else you would like to see CoramBAAF doing to support you as practitioners?

5.2 Members shared their own experiences and those of their networks. Key points raised were:

- Dismissal and gaslighting from majority groups who are not effected by these attitudes

- Social workers not being allowed to discuss politics, as it is unprofessional, whilst trying to start conversations around racism
- The role of the corporate parent in raising anti-racist young people and how people avoid this work stating it conflicts with the need to stay neutral. However, anti-racist practice is about human rights and challenging disccimnation and opression.
- Muslim women feeling unsafe wearing their hijab; not wanting to go out alone. Examples given of one woman quitting her job to avoid commuting in the dark, and another brutally attacked by three white men.
- Far right groups taking over the Flag by exploiting feelings of national pride, and the resentment this fuels in non-racist people who want to reclaim it.
- Refugees Welcome Posters 2025: Frequently Asked Questions - 38 Degrees
- Link to rise in misogyny and the impact on young people
- Supporting children raised in racist families to see alternative perspectives
- The need for open, honest conversations in safe spaces without judgement
- The danger of encouraging a culture of silence, as people become increasingly fearful of saying the 'wrong thing' or being misunderstood

Action: Members are welcome to contact EF for further discussion on this.

Action: Members can share good practice solutions, or resources, to be included on CoramBAAF website.

6. How children's social workers build trusting relationships through communication and transparency

6.1 A query was raised by a member of the CoramBAAF Foster Carer Advisory Committee, about social worker communication with children and the need for honesty regarding how long this relationship will last:

"I wondered if there was scope for a conversation about social workers explaining they are working with a child on a short-term basis? For our children it would certainly reduce the feelings of mistrust and abandonment; at the moment our eight-year-old has insightfully explained that there is no point in sharing her perspective with the professionals as they 'always leave before doing anything'."

6.2 It was recognised that the high turnover of social work staff has a significant impact on both foster carers and children. In this instance, foster carers are referring to social workers who know their role is short-term before meeting the child (e.g., they are a student, about to go on maternity leave, providing temporary cover etc.) When it comes to a child's trust in professionals, damage can be limited by being clear about this from the start. Additionally, not every practitioner who visits the foster home should need to see the young person (e.g., duty social workers carrying out supervisions, or unknown social workers covering annual leave.) In the interest of wellbeing, a child's direct interaction with professionals should be limited where possible.

6.3 CR suggested social workers lack practical training and an awareness of the amount of paperwork involved. A child's trust must be earned and a social worker's need to tick a box does not automatically give them the right to their life story. The more they repeat themselves the more reluctant the child will be to share (even though many feel like they have to). LC recommended that all social workers attend 'total respect' training delivered by young people. It was also

proposed that a paid mentorship programme be introduced, enabling care leavers to advocate for young people.

6.4 Members agreed all new social workers should read handover notes prior to meeting a child. Additionally, their foster carer(s) should be spoken to separately first, to gain an understanding of how the child communicates and where they are at currently. Equally, if a child does not wish to talk that should be respected.

6.5 CJ acknowledged the reason why most social workers leave their post is due to overwork. In these cases, professionals go into their role thinking it will be permanent, only to find it unsustainable for their mental and physical health.

6.6 AG shared reports from Scotland on Setting the Bar; suggesting methods of tackling the social work recruitment and retention crisis. This is part of how The Promise is prioritising relationship-based practice, influenced by the voices of young people. AG emphasised the importance of effective social work management and reflective, relationship-based supervisions.

7. Member information exchange and updates

7.1 AFKA have been funded by Scottish government to produce good practice permanence guides for social workers. These are currently out for pilot in Scotland and will be available from April 2026 on AFKA's website. Foster care, kinship care and adoption are all covered.

- Supporting and nurturing connections
- Supporting birth families
- Supporting families providing permanent care

7.2 AFKA Scotland current guide on transitions: Staying Connected Toolkit

7.3 NFJO research:

- Children meeting with judges in public law – anticipated; December 2025/January 2026
- Foundations practice guides x2: Systematic review on interventions for foster carers and adoptive parents; anticipated April 2026.

8. Any other business

8.1 Agencies are not encouraging **Staying Put** arrangements in response to foster carer shortages. Foster carers with only one bedroom are not being encouraged to keep a young person past age 18, if that bed could be used for another child. This attitude is fueled by the sufficiency crisis, but is not in the best interests of young people, for whom Staying Put is vital for preventing the 'cliff edge'. However, Staying Put as it stands is not fit for purpose.

8.2 CoramBAAF to communicate with this group about fostering reforms, once the announcement is made.

Date of next meeting: 10 March 2026, 11am – 12.30pm