

Minutes

4 February 2026 | 11am – 3pm

Coram Campus, London

Chairs: Steven O'Reilly and Cara Jones

Present (in person)

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Nottingham	JAB
Hanan Al-Najjar	Waltham Forest	HAN
Paul Calder	Kent	PC
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Cara Jones	Chrysalis Consortium	CJ
Elrose Lindsey	Wolverhampton	EL
Steven O'Reilly	TACT	SOR
Melanie Stubbs	Shropshire	MS
Fiona Trewartha	East Riding, Yorkshire	FT

Present (online)

Adam Dalal	Blackburn with Darwen BC	AD
Dawn Elliot	Leeds	DE
Nazeema Gill	Homefinding fostering agency	NG
Shada Panjabi	Waltham Forest	SP

In attendance

James Bury	CoramBAAF	JB
Carol Homden	Coram	CH

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 SOR and CJ welcomed members to the meeting and initiated a round of introductions. Members took it in turns to share life updates, celebrations and current greatest frustrations.
- 1.2 PC and EL were welcomed as a new members of the committee.

2. Free school meals

- 2.1 JAB shared a presentation on the positive impact of free school meals for children in foster care. Information covered included the lack of protective legislative protection, inconsistency of practice across schools and local authorities, and ideas for potential future steps.

Action: JAB to share document with the group.

- 2.2 The majority of committee members had been affected by the free school meal guidance and/or knew other foster carers in their networks who had been affected. It was agreed this committee would move forward with recommending the policy (not guidance) of giving free school meals to all children in foster, regardless of their school or local authority.

Action: FCAC to recommend to DfE that all children in foster care be given free school meals, and that this be written as policy not guidance.

3. Equality diversity and inclusion

- 3.1 This year, Ramadan is taking place around 17 February to 19 March 2026.
- 3.2 HAN shared a presentation on 'Foster Care and Islam – supporting identity, faith and belonging.' This presentation tool was designed as a training tool to support foster carers looking after Muslim children. Objectives of this session were to:
- Understand the fundamental beliefs of Islam
 - Clarify the difference between Kafalah (Islamic fostering) and legal adoption
 - Explore the diversity of the Muslim world (The Ummah)
 - Understand Ramadan
 - Provide practical support strategies for Ramadan and Eid
- 3.3 Members discussed their experiences, and that of their networks, of caring for Muslim children. The lack of information and practical support available to foster carers and social workers was recognised, highlighting the need for more resources like HAN's presentation.
- 3.4 AD recommended [guides](#) from [My Foster Family](#) as a valuable source of information.
- 3.5 Members were briefly joined by Carol Homdan (Coram Group CEO) and James Bury (joint interim Managing Director for CoramBAAF).

4. Fostering reforms

- 4.1 Following a launch event at Coram Campus on 3 February, Josh Macalister has announced the government's plans to reform fostering and recruit [homes for 10,000 more children](#). Documents published by the Department for Education were shared with the group:
- [Foster care reform - proposed changes to assessment and handling of allegations of abuse - consultation](#)
 - [Fostering for the future: improving the foster care system - call for evidence](#)
- 4.2 Several committee members who attended the launch event shared their initial response. Overall, attendees came away feeling energised and optimistic about the changes, encouraged by the fact that the government seem to be listening to foster carers. However, it was noted that the focus was more on recruitment than retention. Particular concern was expressed regarding the proposal to remove panels from the approval and annual review processes.
- 4.3 CJ and SOR shared a draft statement outlining this committee's initial reaction to these reforms. Members agreed on a finalised version to be published on the CoramBAAF website. CoramBAAF have published their own separate [statement](#).

4.4 In light of the 6-week consultation period, members considered how best to submit a collective response, in addition to each of their individual responses. It was decided members would meet online in smaller groups (on a voluntary basis) to focus on 1 topic at a time. Two members volunteered to co-facilitate each topic discussion and provide a short briefing note beforehand. Topics selected were:

- Panels
- Allegations
- Fostering limit
- DBS and vetting
- National register
- Financial transparency

Action: GC to arrange six 1-hour sessions in the next six weeks, and circulate relevant documents/page numbers in advance.

Action: Members to respond to polls with their availability, and prep topic discussions if facilitating.

Action: GC and EF to write up and submit committee response, based on group discussions and email threads.

Next meeting: Wednesday 29 April (online)