

# Independent Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose 2025 – 2026

## **SUMMARY**

This document provides details of Brighter Futures for Children's IFA structure, staffing, values, aims, service objectives and systems.

## **OWNER**

Hilary Loades – IFA Responsible Individual

## **VERSION**

V 1.0

## **DATE**

April 2025

## **REVIEW DATE**

September 2025

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Company number 11293709

BFfC's IFA number 2502331

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## 1. Introduction

Brighter Futures for Children's Independent Fostering Agency (BFfC IFA) was registered with Ofsted in January 2019<sup>1</sup> and although independent of Brighter Futures for Children's operations and governance, it holds responsibility for discharging Reading Children's Services' fostering functions.

No conditions are attached to the Agency's registration.

Our Statement of Purpose, produced in accordance with Fostering Services Regulation 3, includes:

- Details of the aims and objectives of Brighter Futures for Children's Independent Fostering Agency (BFfC's IFA)
- Details of the services and facilities provided by BFfC's IFA.

The statement of purpose is for:

- The children and young people who are in the care of Foster Carers approved and managed by the IFA.
- The birth relatives of the above children looked after.
- Potential and approved foster carers.
- Social workers and social care managers, both internal and external to the agency.
- Fostering panel members.
- Elected members.
- BFfC board members.
- Ofsted.
- Members of the public.

BFfC's IFA's Statement of Purpose is formally considered and signed off by the BFfC Operational Leadership Group. The BFfC Fostering Committee also considers the Statement of Purpose and is able to make recommendations regarding practice.

The statement is reviewed annually, and more often if there is any significant change to the agency's aims, objectives, services, facilities, or staffing, and is revised as appropriate.

## 2. Principles

The principles and requirements of the following legislation and regulations all underpin the work of BFfC's IFA.

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 2004
- The Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management, and support of Foster Carers 2005

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<sup>1</sup> Registration number: 2502331

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (updated 2013)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013  
(These amend the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 with respect to the assessment and approval of foster carers for looked after children).
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Department for Education guidance, circulars, and letters
- Other relevant legislation

BFFC's IFA is committed to providing comprehensive fostering services, operating within all current regulations, statutory guidance, and best practice principles.

Key documents can be found by clicking the following links:

- [The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2011/51301/1-1)
- [Fostering services: national minimum standards – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards)
- [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) Regulations 2013 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2013/50001/1-1)

BFFC's IFA is part of a range of BFFC services, which seek to promote the upbringing of children by their families in accordance with the spirit and provision of the Children Act 1989. The IFA seeks to provide high quality foster homes for children looked after who require placements outside of their families, that enable them to maintain appropriate contact with their family members and support reunification when this is appropriate and achievable. The IFA is also committed to recruiting and maintaining a pool of suitably experienced foster carers who are able to meet the long-term placement needs of children looked after whose care plans are for them to achieve permanence through fostering.

### 3. Values statement

The values statement below is adapted from the 2011 National Minimum Standards (updated 2013), and reflects the values agreed by BFFC's IFA.

#### Values – Children

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- Children should have enjoyable childhoods in which they benefit from excellent parenting and education and are able to enjoy a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills in ways which will support them to achieve successful adult lives.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.

- Every child should have their wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The significance of contact for children who are looked after, and of maintaining relationships with their birth parents and wider families, including siblings, halfsiblings, and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care should be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and should have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer(s) should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Children, birth parents/families and foster carers/families must be valued and respected.

### Values – Foster Carers

- The role of foster carers in providing homes for children must be valued and respected.
- All prospective carers must be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the preparation, assessment, and approval process. No applicant should ever be discriminated against on grounds of age, disability, ethnicity, culture, language, sexuality, gender, financial status or marital or partnership status.
- Every applicant is entitled to know what issues will be considered in their assessment, and to be kept informed of progress throughout. They have the right to receive a copy of their assessment report before the IFA panel meeting where their application is to be considered, and to have the opportunity to comment on the report and to attend the panel and be heard if they wish.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child(ren) who they are caring for.
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to enable them to provide the best possible individualised care for children who are living in their care.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

### Equality and Diversity

- BFFC's IFA is committed to the principles of equal opportunity in all areas of its service.
- As a service, we are also committed to promoting diversity and non-discriminatory practice in all aspects of our work with and on behalf of children, their carers and their family

members. We have a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment, and victimisation, regardless of to whom it is directed.

- We are committed to ensuring that no child looked after, or relative of a child looked after, and no prospective or approved foster carer, experiences discrimination on the grounds of any protected characteristic or on any other grounds that cannot be justified.

BFFC IFA's Equality & Diversity Policy (2023-2025) can be accessed via the following link: [Promoting Equality and Diversity | BFFC \(brighterfuturesforchildren.org\)](https://www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org/Equality-and-Diversity)

## 4. Aims and objectives

BFFC's IFA supports the view that children are generally best brought up in their own homes with their parents playing a full part in their upbringing; however, we also recognise that this is not always possible. Given this, our key objective is to develop services that enable children and young people who are looked after to experience positive, safe, and nurturing substitute care within a family environment, for as long as they require such care.

### Fostered children

In line with the five key outcomes areas of 'Every Child Matters' and the requirements of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards, we aim to recruit and support a pool of foster carers who are able to:

- Provide a suitable physical environment for children and promote them being able to access activities that support their development.
- Promote children's individual identities and potential through individualised care.
- Promote positive behaviours and relationships, supporting children to enjoy positive relationships with their foster families, to interact positively with others, and to behave appropriately.
- Safeguard children and protect them from significant harm, including neglect, abuse, and accident.
- If children go missing, ensure that they are as far as possible protected and respond positively on their return.
- Promote good health and well-being, enabling children to live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional, and psychological health is promoted, and where they are able to access the services required to meet their individual health needs.
- Promote children's education and support them to achieve their educational potential.
- Support children to enjoy interests and activities that will support their growth and development, including both school based and out of school activities that will enable them to develop their personal interests and confidence in their skills and abilities.
- Where appropriate promote and support children having constructive contact with their parents, siblings, and wider family members, and with other people who are significant in their lives.
- Support children's transitions in a sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued.
- Treat foster children the same as any other children living within their household, ensuring that they are able to feel part of the family, that their needs are met, and that they benefit from experiencing stable home and family lives.

- Support children and young people to achieve their potential, and to develop age-appropriate self-help skills, that will prepare them for and support them in moving into adult life and achieving economic well-being as adults.

Additionally, the IFA will:

- Ensure that children are cared for in line with their placement plans and are supported to both contribute to their Child Looked After reviews and provide feedback as part of their foster carers' annual household reviews.
- Ensure that all significant events relating to the health and protection of children fostered by the Agency are notified to the appropriate authorities.

### Foster carers

We aim to recruit and sustain professional, resilient carers who can provide foster children with a positive and nurturing experience of family care (as detailed above).

We are committed to recruiting and retaining foster carers from different ethnic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, who live within the Reading area or within 20 miles of Reading's boundaries. Carers will be required to be able to comply with the National Minimum Standards, and willing to work towards meeting the Training, Support and Development standards (TSDS). In order to achieve this, we are committed to:

- Recruiting assessing and supporting a range of foster carers who are likely to be able to meet and match the varied needs of children and young people who are in care.
- Providing foster carers with the training and development opportunities that they need in order to carry out their roles effectively.
- Ensuring that foster carers receive the support and supervision that they need in order to provide appropriate care for the foster children living with them.
- Ensuring that the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Makers make timely and well considered recommendations and decisions, in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.
- Achieving appropriate matching between carers and children requiring foster homes, so as to best ensure that the carers are capable of meeting each child's individual needs, and that the care provided will be consistent with the wishes, feelings, and best interests of the child, so maximising the likelihood of achieving stable placements.
- Ensuring that foster carers are clear about the Agency's payment structures and the payments due to them, and that payments to foster carers are in line with the Agency's Payments Policy and paid in a timely way.
- Ensuring that any suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children, and the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

### Staff

We aim to ensure that our IFA staff:

- Are fully conversant with the requirements of:
  - The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
  - Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 (updated 2013)

- The code of practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management, and support of foster carers.
- Are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and to provide a high-quality service to children who require homes, foster carers and placing authorities.

## Management of the IFA

We aim to ensure that:

- Our IFA is managed ethically, effectively, and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of its users.
- Record keeping within the IFA is in line working with regulatory requirements and case records contribute to an understanding of the lives of the children placed.

## 5. The organisational structure and management of the service

The directors of Brighter Futures for Children's Independent Fostering Agency (BFfC's IFA) are:

- Lara Patel – Executive Director of Children's Services
- Maria Young – Director of Family Help & Safeguarding Children's Services

The role of Responsible Individual is held by Hilary Loades-Bannon – Brighter Futures for Children's Head of Service, Corporate Parenting, Fostering, Special Guardianship & Adoption.

The role of Registered Manager is held by Steffi Roth who manages the day-to-day business and operation of the IFA.

Within BFfC the role of Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Fostering is shared between:

- Hilary Loades – Head of Service, Corporate Parenting, Fostering, Special Guardianship & Adoption.
- Roselind Moodley – Service Manager, Corporate Parenting.

The above Officers are based at:

Floor 1, Civic Offices, Bridge St, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 2LU.

Every foster carer who is approved by the IFA has an allocated supervising social worker who is based within the IFA and works out of the Civic Offices in Reading. (Please see Appendix A – IFA Service structure).

The staffing structure of the IFA was reviewed and a new structure implemented in May 2024 which has provided a clearer focus on carer recruitment and retention.

The social workers employed within the IFA undertake Form F assessments, provide foster carer training, and provide supervising social worker supervision and support to carers. Where necessary social workers are supported to acquire the required level of knowledge and experience to undertake these specialist roles. All social workers are supervised by a qualified social work manager. If social workers lack the requisite level of experience, their line-managers have the necessary experience to ensure that all Agency carers are supported appropriately and effectively, and all practice is compliant with regulatory requirements.

Safe recruitment practices are in place, with appropriate references being taken up and confirmed prior to any job offers being made. All social workers, senior practitioners, and managers are



registered with Social Work England. All social work practitioners and managers are supported by named business support workers.

## Qualifications and experience

### The Responsible Individual

Hilary Loades-Bannon holds a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (awarded in 1984) and a Post Graduate Certificate in Health and Social Care Management (awarded in 2006). She has over 30 years' experience of managing fostering and adoption/permanence services. She held various team manager roles in Wokingham borough from 1992 to 2014, at different times holding responsibility for the local authority's family placement, fostering, and/or adoption/permanence services. Between December 2014 and December 2017, she held the post of team manager and then service manager of Adopt Berkshire (a shared adoption service working on behalf of four of the Berkshire unitary authorities).

Hilary joined Reading Children's Services (now Brighter Futures for Children), in December 2017, initially in a quality assurance role, prior to assuming the role of Service Lead for Adoption & Permanence in January 2019. She took up her current role on 1st April 2022 and became the IFA Responsible Individual in October 2022.

### The Registered Manager

Steffi Roth qualified as a Social Worker in 2005 in Germany. She holds a Masters in Social Pedagogy (which is the equivalent to an MA in the Arts of Education in England), and a Post Graduate Qualification in Management and Leadership Level 5 (awarded in January 2022). She has over 17 years' experience of working as a social worker or social work manager in England. Steffi joined Reading Children's Services (now Brighter Futures for Children), in August 2009, initially being employed as a social work practitioner in various areas of fostering prior to moving into her first management role in 2013.

Steffi has over 11 years of management experience within Reading's fostering service, initially assuming the role of Assistant Team Manager in 2013, prior to becoming Reading Children's Services' Fostering Team Manager in 2017. She became the IFA Registered Manager in March 2019.

## 6. Types of fostering offered by the Agency

The BFfC IFA offers the following types of placements:

### Emergency care

Emergency carers provide time-limited care for children and young people in emergency situations, these situations usually happen outside of office hours.

### Short term care

Short-term foster carers provide temporary care for one or more children or young people, who are unable to live with their family/families. These arrangements can last from a few days or weeks, to several months or longer. Short-term foster placements are temporary arrangements, which are usually needed to cover the period of time when legal proceedings in respect of the child(ren) concerned are ongoing and plans are being made in respect of the child(ren)'s longer term care.

Regular contact with significant people such as the child(ren)'s birth family members is an important part of short-term fostering.

### Long term carers

Long-term foster carers provide long-term care (usually until adulthood) for children looked after who require permanence through fostering. Long-term foster children usually remain living with their permanent carers whilst they remain in full time education, and many will then remain living with their long-term foster families post-18 under a 'Staying-Put' arrangement, moving on into independence when they are ready to do so. Children will be formally matched to their long-term foster carers at the IFA fostering panel. Children matched long-term will continue to have an allocated social worker, however, provided that their placements are stable, these children usually receive less frequent social work visits, as it is recognised that for such children a reduction in social work contact often supports them feeling 'at home' in their foster families.

### Respite care

Respite carers offer support to other foster carers, including daytime care and planned overnight stays. Respite carers can be members of a foster carer's extended family who have been approved specifically for this role; in these cases the foster child will likely already know them in advance of being cared for by or going to stay with them. Children and young people may also be cared for or stay with other approved foster carers for short periods of time.

### Bridging carers

Bridging foster carers provide a family home for children who are moving from one placement to another. If a child or young person's long-term placement breaks down, the child/young person will usually need time to process this and to adjust to their change of situation before moving to another matched foster family. Bridging foster carers provide a neutral foster home, usually for no more than six months, to help children get over the loss of their previous foster carer(s)/family and assist them in building attachments to a new family.

When children looked after need short term foster placements but it is anticipated that in time their care plans will become 'permanence through fostering', BFFC will seek where possible to place these children with foster carers who may be able to go on to provide appropriate long term placements for them (thus reducing the number of placement moves that each child will experience); in these circumstances we refer to these placements as 'bridging to permanence' placements (please see Section 8 below).

### Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people

Some foster carers provide homes for young people who have travelled to the UK from overseas and are seeking asylum. These carers usually have a connection with the children/young people's country of heritage and are able to converse with them in their first language. Many of these young people have experienced significant trauma, and these specialist carers are supported to meet the young people's individual care needs through tailored plans.

### Parent and child carers<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **Note:** The BFFC IFA does not currently have any approved Parent & Child foster carers, however the IFA is keen to recruit a small number of in-house carers who are able to offer these placements.

Parent and child foster carers provide homes for parents along with their babies or young children<sup>3</sup>. These arrangements are usually required when court proceedings in respect of a very young child are ongoing and enable the parent to continue to care for their child whilst the child is maintained in a safe environment. During these placements one or both of the child's parents are usually subject to parenting assessments which the carer(s) will often be required to contribute to. Carers will also be expected to support the parent(s) to develop their existing parenting skills, providing both support and guidance whilst ensuring that the child remains safe at all times.

### Staying Put arrangements

Whilst Staying Put arrangements fall outside of the fostering regulations, BFFC's IFA supports young people to remain in the care of their previous foster carers under Staying Put when this is appropriate to the needs of the young people concerned.

Staying Put arrangements enable long-term fostered children/young people to remain living with their existing foster carers after they achieve the age of 18. The foster carers enter into a 'Staying Put' arrangement or a licence agreement to continue to care for the young adult care leaver for a continuing period, until the young person feels ready to move on to independence; this may include whilst the young person completes university or other forms of higher education. Staying Put arrangements can last until the young person's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Staying Put arrangements enable young adult care leavers to experience transitions similar to their peers, and such arrangements are proven to best prepare young people to successfully manage independent living when they do move on.

## 7. The role of placing authorities

The social work role for children who are living with BFFC IFA approved carers is provided by their placing authorities, who continue to hold corporate parenting responsibility for the children. The social work role to Reading children looked after who require fostering is provided by their named social workers employed within BFFC's social work teams based at the Civic Offices in Reading.

Where children looked after are to be matched with a view to permanence through fostering with BFFC IFA approved foster carers, the matching process will be undertaken by the children's social work team, but the supervising social worker for the carers will cooperate with this process and support the carers during any matching interviews and when attending panel. The proposed match will be presented to the placing authority's fostering panel, which in the case of BFFC children looked after will be the BFFC fostering panel, but in the case of children to be placed by external local authorities will be that local authority's own fostering panel. Whichever the panel, the foster carer(s)' supervising social worker should be invited to attend the panel in order to support the foster carers.

## 8. The recruitment, preparation, and assessment of foster carers

Our fostering service is part of Local Authority Fostering South-East, and as such we are working closely with the other eight local authority fostering services that are within our sub-cluster: Bracknell Forest, Kingston, Oxfordshire, Richmond, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor & Maidenhead,

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<sup>3</sup> **Note:** Parent and child placements will only include one of the child's parents. However, if the parents remain in a relationship there may be significant ongoing involvement with the second parent.

and Wokingham, in respect of foster carer recruitment and retention. This offers the opportunity for new and innovative ways of working.

We have a pro-active approach to foster carer recruitment and seek to recruit and maintain a diverse pool of foster carers who are able to meet the care and support needs of children looked after aged up to 18 years, who will benefit from remaining living in or local to the Reading area. Recruitment and consideration of all potential foster care applicants is carried out in accordance with both BfC and BfC IFA's equal opportunities policies and safe recruitment strategy.

All applicants are invited to attend a three day 'Skills to Foster' training course, which is aimed at providing them with a realistic understanding of the fostering task. This will also enable prospective carers to talk with experienced foster carers and to meet other potential applicants who are going through the same preparation and assessment process. Our IFA uses the CoramBAAF Form F format for the assessment of potential carers, which encompasses all the necessary criteria for the collection, collation, analysis, and presentation of data, and the demonstration of the competencies required to foster.

During the assessment references are taken up and referees are interviewed. Enhanced checks on applicants are carried out with the DBS, and checks/references are sought from all local authorities where an applicant has lived within the last 10 years, current/previous employers and other appropriate bodies and agencies. Prospective foster carers also undergo a medical examination with their own GP to ascertain their physical and mental fitness for the task. Carers who have lived overseas as adults will also need to have checks undertaken on them by the countries they were resident in. At the completion of the assessment the assessing social worker compiles a report, along with other relevant documents that are then considered by BfC IFA's Fostering Panel. The assessing social worker is required to attend the Panel when the application is being considered; the applicant(s) are also invited to attend, however attendance is not compulsory.

Feedback about the whole assessment process, from initial enquiry to attendance at Panel is sought from all applicants and is monitored and used to inform the ongoing development of our fostering service.

We currently have a team of four fostering social workers who hold responsibility for the preparation and assessment of new carers and for providing supervising social worker support and training to our currently approved carers.

During 2025/2026 we will be developing and expanding our in-house fostering service in a number of ways, including developing our own in-house therapeutic foster carer scheme. This will initially focus on recruiting a cohort of 6-8 therapeutic foster carers able to provide placements for single children aged between 8 and 12 years who are highly vulnerable and/or present challenging behaviours, and for sibling pairs where the elder child is aged between 8 -12 and there is a challenging sibling dynamic due to previous experiences of trauma. It is anticipated that this scheme will be launched in late spring 2025. Once this scheme is fully recruited to and operational we hope to build on it further by establishing an Enhanced Therapeutic Foster Care scheme during 2025/2026, which will build on our previous experience and provide specialist placements to adolescents aged 13 and over.

During 2025/2026 we are also planning to develop a Parent & Child Foster Care Scheme. Parent & Child foster carers will provide care and support to young parents who need help and guidance to be

able to care and support their child(ren) safely (see section 6 above). These are expected to usually be short term arrangements (approximately 12 – 16 weeks).

## 9. Foster carer training and support

Following approval all of our BfFC IFA approved foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker, who will then be responsible for providing their ongoing supervision and support around their fostering role. Supervising social workers are required to meet with each carer regularly in line with the requirements of the Fostering National Minimum Standards. More frequent visits will be offered if a foster carer needs a higher level of support around managing particular aspects of the fostering task or in relation to their care of a specific child or young person.

All foster carers are required to complete Training, Support & Development Standards (TSDS) within their first year of approval. This training is offered on-line and supervising social workers will provide support to carers in completing this as required. In addition to this, foster carers are required to complete a total of 14 additional trainings by the time of their first annual foster carer household review (i.e., within 12 months of being approved to foster). Given this it is usually expected that prospective carers will aim to complete 7 of these mandatory trainings in the preparation period, so as to reduce the training demand on them in the first 12-months following their approval, when they will likely have a foster child(ren) placed in their care for some or all of the time.

Some training, by its nature, has to be provided face-to-face (e.g. paediatric first aid) but many courses can be completed on-line so enabling carers to access and complete training at times that are convenient to them.

All BfFC foster carers are also able to access a wide range of other training, depending on their particular interests and experience around fostering.

## 10. Foster carer reviews

The fostering regulations require that all foster carer households are reviewed on at least an annual basis, and more frequently if there has been a significant change within the household or a child protection or safeguarding (Section 47) enquiry or serious complaint. All reviews include the foster carer(s) and their supervising social worker preparing a draft report for the review according to a standard agency format. This is then followed by a formal review meeting facilitated by our BfFC Foster Carer Reviewing Officer. We seek to work in partnership with our approved foster carers in completing these reviews, and as part of the review process also seek feed-back from the carer(s)' own children (if of an appropriate age), the children who the carer(s) have looked after, and the social workers for the children placed. We are keen for our approved foster carers to progress within their fostering careers, so the review process will also consider the training that carers have completed and their future training needs and how these can best be addressed.

All foster carers' first annual reviews are presented to our IFA Fostering Panel which may then recommend a variation or continuation of their original approval. Subsequent reviews will be presented to the Panel on regular a 3-yearly basis or if a change of approval is sought.

## 11. The IFA Panel

BfFC generally aims to hold two fostering panels each month, although this may vary in line with demand. Panels are constituted in accordance with current legislation, regulations, and guidance. The two panels each have an independent chairperson, but they share a vice-chair, other panel

members are drawn from a central list. There is no legal maximum number of panel members at each panel, but in practice a maximum of five or six usually attend each panel, including the panel chair. Medical advice to the panels is provided by a paediatrician who is also a panel member. Both panels are serviced by a designated panel administrator, and both have access to legal advice if required.

Current membership includes individuals with personal experience of fostering (previous and current foster carers) and other independent members from legal, educational, and therapeutic backgrounds. It also includes social workers with direct experience of children & families and family placement work. The panels are as far as possible balanced in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and experience, although it is recognised that further work is needed in this area and recruitment of care experienced panel members is being pursued.

The panels jointly serve both BFFC's IFA and the BFFC Permanence Service. The functions of the panels in relation to IFA matters are:

- to recommend whether prospective carers are suitable to foster.
- to consider carers' first annual household reviews.
- to consider carers' annual household reviews on a three-yearly basis (following their first annual review), and additional household reviews if this is recommended by the Independent Foster Carer Reviewing Officer or has been requested by the panel.
- to be aware of and note any proposed variation of a carer's approval.
- to be aware of and note any termination of a carer's approval.
- to consider any written representations received from a foster carer in relation to a 'qualifying determination' made by one of the Agency's ADMs Fostering.
- To consider any matters that the IFA refers to the panel and make recommendations on such matters or cases.

When considering the approval of prospective foster carers, the panels can also give advice about the numbers and ages of children to be placed.

The panel has a monitoring role regarding quality assurance and ensuring that the timescales as set out in the National Minimum Standards (Standard 14) are met.

The panels make recommendations based on written reports prepared in advance by the assessing social worker or the carers' supervising social worker and/or the child(ren)'s social worker; and on the social worker(s)' and/or their manager(s)' contributions to panel discussion. Social workers, and where appropriate their managers, are expected to attend panel to discuss and clarify any issues relevant to the application under consideration. When the approval of prospective foster carer(s) or the review of already approved foster carer(s) is to be considered, the potential or existing carer(s) are invited to attend the panel for this panel item, however, attendance is not compulsory and if carer(s) choose not to attend this should not affect the consideration of their approval or continuing approval.

## 12. The Agency Decision Maker's decision

Following each panel meeting, the recommendations and advice of the panel are referred, along with the final minutes of the meeting, to the responsible Agency Decision Maker (ADM) Fostering.

Responsibility for making the final agency decision then rests with the ADM. Agency decisions are made and conveyed to all parties within the time scales laid down in the National Minimum Standards (Standard 14).

If applicants or approved foster carers are not in agreement with the ADM decision made in respect of their application, or a suggested change to their existing approval, there are processes by which they can request that this be reviewed; this includes options for them to make written representation to the agency or to apply for the decision to be reviewed by an independent review panel convened by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM): [Independent Review Mechanism - GOV.UK](#)

Access to the IRM is restricted to applications from potential and approved foster carers where the agency has decided not to approve them, or to terminate or change their terms of their approval (Fostering Service Regulations 2011 – section 29(1)).

### 13. BfC's foster carer skill levels

As detailed above, BfC is keen to support our IFA approved foster carers to progress within their fostering careers. To this end, while most newly approved foster carers will start their fostering careers as skill level 1 carers (unless they have significant previous professional experience which will support them in their fostering role), foster carers are then able to progress to level 2 and level 3 as they gain more experience in fostering and related skills. Each skill level has a range of associated competencies that carers are required to meet and maintain, and associated training requirements.

Foster carers can choose whether or not they want to move through the skill level structure and can from choice remain as skill level 1 foster carers.

### 14. Foster carer allowances and fees

BfC's foster carers all receive a child maintenance allowance and a foster carer fee when a child is placed in their care. The child maintenance allowance is paid at different rates depending on the age of the child. Our foster carer fee scheme enables foster carers to be paid higher fees as they progress in their fostering careers and gain more skills and experience relevant to the fostering role and are therefore able to care for children with more complex needs.

Full details of our foster carer fee scheme is available at: [\[Link to be inserted to Reading Children's Services Foster Carer Fee Scheme – Information for Foster Carers\]](#)

### 15. Children's guides to fostering

The IFA has three different children's guides to fostering, to be used with children of different ages to introduce them to the concept of foster care and to help them to understand what they can expect whilst they are living with a foster family:

- 'Freddie Futures Story about Fostering' (aimed for use with children aged around 3-7 years).
- 'Children and Young People's Guide to Foster Care' (aimed for use with children with the understanding of an average 8–11-year-old).
- 'A Young Person's Guide to Foster Care' (aimed at young people aged 11-16 years).

These guides include a summary of what the IFA sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, and for 8–16-year-olds how a child or young person can contact their Independent



Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director and/or Ofsted, if they wish to raise a concern, and how to secure access to a range of independent advocate services.

The National Minimum Standards (Standard 16) requires that subject to a child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures that each fostered child receives a children's guide at the point of placement, and that their foster carer(s) explain the contents of the guide in a way that is accessible to the child. It is recognised that further work is needed in this area to ensure consistency of provision and that children are supported to gain an age-appropriate understanding of what they can expect whilst in foster care.

## 16. Policies & procedures

The IFA has a range of policies and procedures aimed as providing instruction and guidance to staff, in order to support them to effectively perform their roles in a consistent manner that is compliant with all current fostering legislation, regulations and best practice guidance. All policies and procedures are reviewed on a 3-year rolling programme. Staff also have access to the full raft of BFFC policies and guidance for social work staff.

Specific IFA policies and procedures include:

- IFA Assessment Policy (Under review)
- IFA Policy re Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers
- IFA Safeguarding Policy & Procedure
- IFA Equality & Diversity Policy
- IFA Complaints Procedure
- IFA Finance Policy
- IFA Foster Panel procedure
- IFA Recording policy (for staff)
- Staying Put

The IFA also has an electronic Foster Carers' Handbook which provides policy, procedural and best practice advice and guidance for foster carers around a host of subject areas applicable to the fostering role. This handbook is reviewed on a 3-yearly basis with individual sections being updated sooner if changes in regulations or practice guidance require it. This handbook can be accessed at:

[Welcome to the Foster Carers Handbook \(trixononline.co.uk\)](https://trixononline.co.uk)

Full details of BFFC IFA's policy & procedure around the preparation, assessment, and approval of foster carers can be accessed at:

[Fostering Panel Policy | BFFC \(brighterfuturesforchildren.org\)](https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org)

Details of the support that BFFC IFA provides to its agency foster carers can be accessed at:

[Reading Fostering](#)

## 17. Systems for the monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation of services

The quality of services provided to our IFA foster carers is monitored and quality assured via a number of different systems, including:



- Thorough assessment of potential foster carers along with careful consideration by both one of the IFA social work managers and the IFA fostering panel prior to approval.
- The role of ADM Fostering being shared between the BfFC Head of Service, Corporate Parenting, Fostering, Special Guardianship & Adoption, and the BfFC Service Manager Corporate Parenting, so outside of the direct IFA management team (thus providing a greater level of external scrutiny).
- Allocation of a named supervising social worker who visits on a regular basis to provide carer supervision and support and monitor the ongoing issues within any placements.
- Completion of unannounced visits to fostering households made on at least a twice yearly basis.
- Supervising social workers are expected to regularly speak to children and young people during visits to obtain their views about their care.
- All carers being subject to an annual household review.
- The Independent Foster Carer Reviewing Officer, completing a full audit of the carer's case file prior to completing each carer's annual household review.
- All first foster carer household reviews, and subsequently at least every third annual review, being considered by the IFA fostering panel and subsequently one of the BfFC ADMs Fostering.
- Supervising social workers and the Independent Foster Carer Reviewing Officer monitoring whether newly approved foster carers are completing/have completed the Training, Support and Development training that all newly approved carers are required to complete within their first 12 months of approval, and where this is not the case, agreeing an urgent plan to rectify this with the carer(s) concerned, with this plan then being appropriately monitored.
- Supervising social workers and the Independent Foster Carer Reviewing Officer monitoring whether approved carers are completing/have completed the 'mandatory' training (as noted on their Personal Development Plan (PDP)) within the agreed timescales, and where this is not the case, agreeing an urgent plan to rectify this with the carer(s) concerned, with this plan then being appropriately monitored.
- All supervising social workers receiving regular professional supervision.
- The IFA seeks regular feedback from children and young people through questionnaires and support groups about the care that they are receiving and whether, and if so how, this could be improved.
- A programme of themed audits being undertaken within the IFA management team<sup>4</sup>.
- The IFA Registered Manager maintains an overview of the service, including monitoring adherence to performance indicators, data on placements, data on complaints, and issues around Standards of Care<sup>5</sup>.

A level of external scrutiny is also maintained by:

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<sup>4</sup> **Note:** this system of audits is currently being established

<sup>5</sup> **Note:** Action is currently being taken to improve the data monitoring systems within the IFA.  
Brighter Futures for Children | IFA Statement of Purpose 2025/26 | Version 1.0 | HL-B – April 2025

- The BfC Children's Social Care Management Team considering the IFA's annual and half-year service reports and the annual review of the IFA's statement of purpose.
- The BfC IFA Committee meets quarterly and receives written updates regarding service performance. The Committee also considers the IFA's annual and half-year service reports and the annual review of the IFA's statement of purpose.

An overview of the services provided to BfC children looked after who are living with BfC's IFA carers is also maintained through:

- Placement Planning Meetings
- Social work visits and supervision
- Placement Support Meetings
- Placement Stability Meetings
- Children Looked After Reviews
- BfC's programme of case audits

An overview of the services provided to BfC's children looked after is also maintained by:

- The BfC Children's Social Care Management Team

## 18. Commendations and complaints

Where a commendation or complaint relates to:

- any aspect of the recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval, or support of BfC IFA carers
- any aspect of the attitudes expressed, or behaviours exhibited by BfC IFA approved carers
- any aspect of the assessing or supervising social worker role to BfC IFA carers

responsibility for investigating the complaint will rest with BfC's IFA and the process followed will be in line with the IFA's Complaints Procedure:

[Complaints Procedure for foster carers | BfC \(brighterfuturesforchildren.org\)](#)

Where a commendation or complaint relates to any aspect of the social work role to children who are or have been living with BfC IFA carers, responsibility for responding to and investigating the complaint will rest with BfC and the process followed will be in line with the BfC Complaints Procedure: [Compliments and Complaints](#)

Complaints regarding any services provided by BfC should be directed to:

Nayana George, Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager  
Directorate of Resources  
Freepost RTLS-CKGX-RKLL,  
Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU

**Telephone:** 0118 937 2905

**Email:** [complaints@reading.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@reading.gov.uk)

**Text:** Type SPKUP & your message to 81722

Any commendations regarding any of the services provided by BfC's IFA should be directed to:

Maria Young  
Director of Family Help & Safeguarding Children's Services,  
Brighter Futures for Children,  
Floor 1, Civic Offices,  
Bridge Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 2LU

Email: [Maria.young@brighterfuturesforchildren.org](mailto:Maria.young@brighterfuturesforchildren.org)

## 19. The registration authority

Contact details for Ofsted:

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills,  
Ofsted (Southeast Region)  
4th Floor Clive House,  
70 Petty France,  
Westminster, SW1 9EZ.

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0300 123 1231 (General enquiries)

The helpline is open Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm.

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## 20. Feedback

BFfC welcomes feedback from its service users and other interested parties in relation to all aspects of its service provision and we are committed to learning from any feedback received. If you have any comments about our IFA services, these should in the first instance be directed to:

Steffi Roth, BFfC IFA Registered Manager

Email: [Steffi.Roth@brighterfuturesforchildren.org](mailto:Steffi.Roth@brighterfuturesforchildren.org)

Or:

Hilary Loades-Bannon, BFfC IFA responsible Individual

Email: [Hilary.loades-bannon@brighterfuturesforchildren.org](mailto:Hilary.loades-bannon@brighterfuturesforchildren.org)

Brighter Futures for Children,  
Floor 1, Civic Offices,  
Bridge St, Reading RG1 2LU

Appendix A – IFA Agency structure

