

# Minutes

**19 March 2024 | 10am - 12.30pm**

## Present

Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster carer – LA	HAN
Holly Brackell	Camden	HB
Sarah Carter	Essex	SC
Pal Jandu	Camden	PJ
Nazeema Gill	Foster carer – IFA	NG
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	AG
Pal Jandu	Camden	PJ
Cara Jones	Foster carer – IFA	CJ
Charmaine Orchard	Konnected	CO (chair)
Claire Rogers	Treehouse Care	CR
Steffi Roth	Brighter Futures	SR
Liz Spaven	Newcastle LA	LS
Nicola Smith	Barnardo's	NS
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2B Parents	MTR
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	ST (vice chair)

## In attendance

Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC
James Bury	CoramBAAF	JB
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Chris Senior	Department for Education	CS

## Apologies

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster carer - LA	
Sally Barnett	South Coast Fostering	SB
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	LBC
Jacqueline Cassidy	The Fostering Network	JC
Sam Frith-Jones	AFKA Cymru	SFJ
Rebekah Pierre	BASW	RP
Anthony Turner	The Fostering Team	AT
Ruth Willetts	FosterTalk	RW



## 1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 ST welcomed members to the meeting and introductions were made.
- 1.2 The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as an accurate reflection of discussions. Form F has been added to this agenda. Actions to be carried over to future meetings include:

***Action: DK to be invited to a future meeting next year to provide further updates.***

## 2. Form F presentation and discussion

- 2.1 EF presented an overview of the Form F revisions process and showed an updated draft of the new form.
- 2.2 This form will be piloted by 12 fostering services (9 local authorities and 3 independent fostering agencies) between May and December 2024. Members were invited to share their thoughts and feedback. Some key points raised were:
  - Reduced repetition may not speed up process, as depends on individual service resources
  - Importance of inclusive language
  - Importance of corresponding training for practitioners
  - Need for realistic expectations of foster carers to be made clear early on
  - Prospective foster carers needing the opportunity to analyse whether fostering is right for them
  - Foster cares not always being given the freedom to maintain certain relationships
  - Healthy relationships can be subjective
  - Children in long-term fostering belong to two families and live with that tension

## 3. Allegations discussion with DfE

- 3.1 Chris Senior, Department for Education, identified allegations as a key obstacle to foster carer recruitment and retention. Recent Ofsted data shows:
  - allegations are increasing, as are all types of alleged abuse
  - just over half of allegations resulted in no further action, but 46.5% were of concern
  - the number of allegations that are of concern are also increasing
  - only 63% of allegations are resolved within one month/6 weeks (the target is 90%)
  - 25% of cases take more than 10 weeks (with timeframes extending further where there is police involvement.)
- 3.2 DfE are speaking to Ofsted to resolve some gaps in the national data. Gaps include:
  - Incidents of alleged abuse
  - Placement type/ background of alleged allegations i.e. details on mainstream vs. kinship fostering, age, ethnicity, gender etc.
- 3.3 The Fostering Network State of the Nation 2021 report flagged that 66% of foster carers who experienced an allegation had considered resigning during the investigation. This process poses significant challenges and is believed to be a driving factor of termination of approvals, however there is currently no hard evidence to support this theory.
- 3.4 The Fostering Advisory Board have begun exploring this topic, with a view to providing recommendations. This may lead to further conversations regarding funding.



3.5 CS asked members what changes needed to be made regarding practice, services and foster carers to combat the allegations issue.

**Action: Members to contact Chris Senior directly to offer further suggestions: [chris.senior@education.gov.uk](mailto:chris.senior@education.gov.uk)**

3.6 Member thoughts included:

- Errors in information sharing (e.g. between social workers and schools/ schools and foster carers) – a clearer system is needed.
- Clearer guidance on the differences between and proportionate responses to complaints vs. concerns vs. allegations.
- Support is key for foster carers in coping with difficult processes.
- Foster carers should not be assumed guilty before proven innocent, even where good practice dictates the child should always be believed.
- Disproved allegations should not remain on a foster carer's record, as these continue to cast doubt and must continuously be explained for years to come.
- Foster carers should be better informed and supported during the process and not left oblivious to timescales.
- Importance of understanding nuances of investigating foster carers compared to other professionals (e.g. teachers and youth workers.) Specific local authority training should address this.
- Awareness of potential impact of allegations on foster carers who have other careers, such as teachers or police officers.
- The dangers/ poor practice of labelling children as liars.
- Recognising the impact of allegations on birth children and the need to record interactions with foster children.
- Government could provide independent support to foster carers going through the process, or else help charities and other organisations to facilitate practical support (knowing their rights etc.)
- Further work needed to help social workers understand what they can/cannot do during the process.
- The potential impact of less robust pandemic assessments on increasing allegation figures (although no evidence to support this).
- Rising numbers of kinship carers and how this may relate to allegation increases (although no evidence to support this).

**Action: DfE to be invited back to a future meeting to continue discussions**

## 4. Equality, diversity and inclusion

4.1 This week is neurodiversity week (18 – 24 March 2024). Members discussed how neurodivergent children may struggle with school rules and how this could lead to exclusions. Children with trauma developmental delay and attachment disorders face similar difficulties. CR and HAN noted the limited uptake of training by schools saying they don't have time. CJ recognised how foster children receive harsher punishments than other children for the same behavior/ inappropriate action.

**Action: Trauma informed education and neurodiversity to be added to a future agenda**



4.2 The Black Care Experience Conference took place on 17 February 2024. Members shared their positive experiences of this event, where care experienced voices were prominent throughout. We are encouraging organisations to sign up to the [Charter](#).

## 5. **Any other business**

- 5.1 John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development at CoramBAAF, is leaving the organisation at the end of March 2024. John thanks the committee for all their contributions to CoramBAAF's fostering work and wishes them the very best.
- 5.2 Foster Care Fortnight is coming up in May. The theme is 'Fostering Moments' and CoramBAAF will be contacting foster carers about this.
- 5.3 Future agenda suggestions:
- Advocacy
  - Barriers to recruitment and increasing applications

***Date of next meeting: 2 July 2024***