



Brent Fostering and Kinship Statement of Purpose 2024-25

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INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL CONTEXT

Our Statement of Purpose is intended as a useful source of information about Brent's Fostering Service for foster carers, service users, Council staff, elected members, professionals in other agencies, and members of the public.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require all Fostering Services to provide a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service, the management /staffing structures, services provided, the principles and standards of care that are expected and the procedures for recruiting, approving, training, supporting and reviewing foster carers. The Statement of Purpose has to be reviewed and updated every year.

Brent council is fully committed to ensuring that individuals understand what they can expect from the Fostering Service. As such, copies of the Statement of Purpose are made available to:

- Children's Social Care staff who are involved in providing services to looked after children and young people;
- Foster carers and kinship carers and those who are being assessed;
- Brent's Care In Action;
- Brent Care Leavers' In Action.

The Statement of Purpose is underpinned by:

- The Brent Borough Plan- Moving Brent Forward Together for 2023 to 2027
- The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2024 – 2028)
- The Workforce Strategy (2022 – 2026)
- The Private Fostering Statement of Purpose (2024 – 2025)
- Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 (Care Standards Act 2000)
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and statutory guidance

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Brent's Fostering Service recognises the central importance of foster care as a vehicle for transforming the lives of children who need to be looked after. Foster carers play a pivotal role in this process and the Fostering Service is therefore committed to providing them with excellent preparation, training and support to carry out their role efficiently in order to ensure the children they care for reach their full potentials, enjoy and achieve.

The Fostering Service sits within the Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service and is committed to providing a range of safe and secure foster placements with carers who promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with young people, carers, birth families, other professionals and the community.

The vision for the Fostering Service as set out in the service plan is that:

- The best foster carers are recruited for our children;
- All placements receive high quality support, effectively targeted according to need;
- Children are found permanent families without delay – whether within their extended family network or outside;
- The number of children placed closer to home with our in-house foster carers increases;
- Staff within the service are encouraged to become more professionally autonomous and confident.

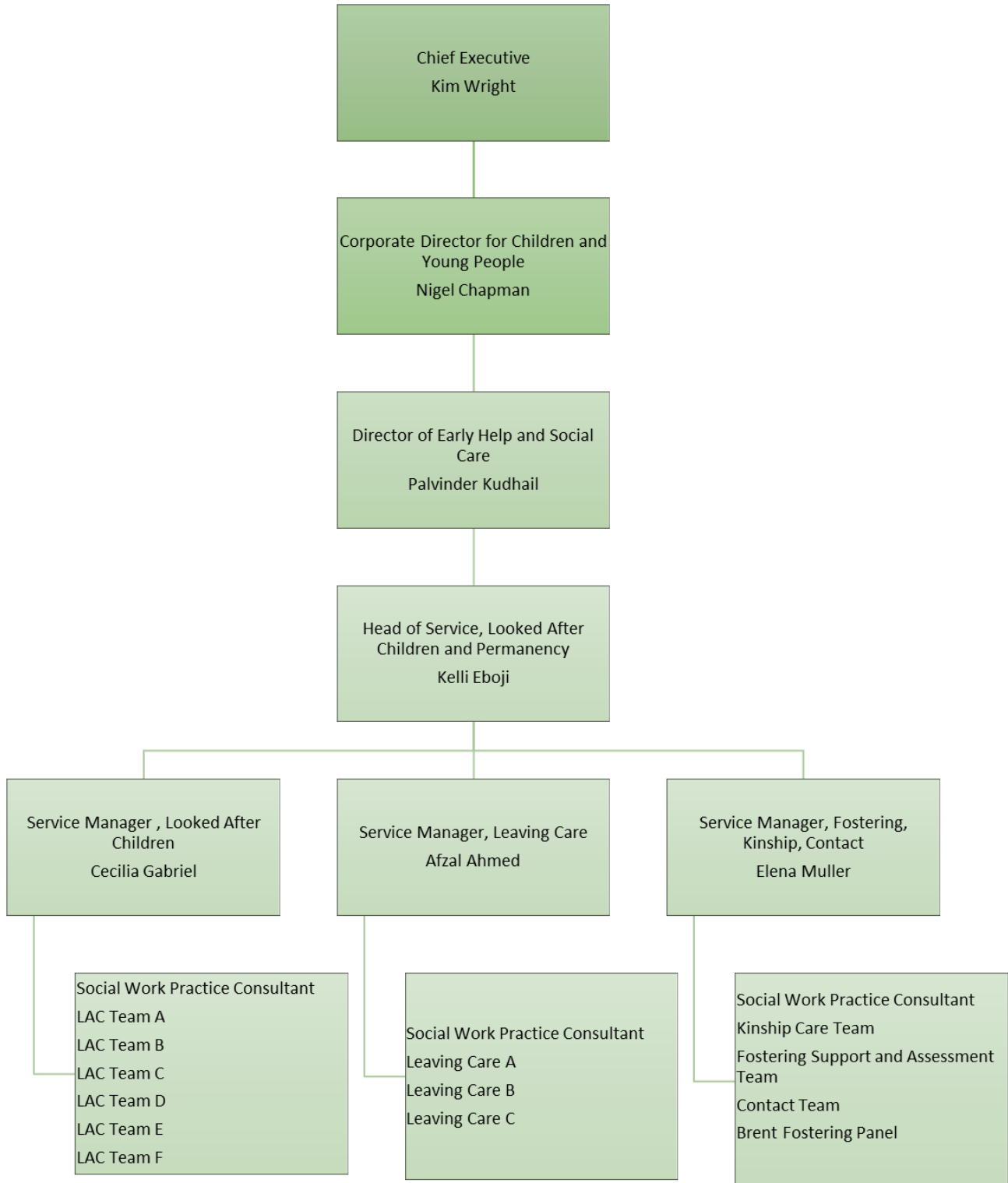
In carrying out its responsibilities, the Service aims:

- To ensure the views of children, parents and carers are sought and are taken into account, having regard for their age and understanding, in the continuous development and improvement of the service;
- To recognise the importance of and support appropriate levels of contact with family and community as is consistent with their welfare and care plan;
- To recognise and value the diverse nature of the community it serves and proactively engage with the local community to identify potential carers;
- To ensure there is a sufficient range of safe and appropriate placements available for the Looked After Children in Brent;
- To actively monitor and supervise all placements to ensure children are safe, their needs are met and they are making progress to achieve positive outcomes;
- To contribute to and ensure effective multi-disciplinary and partnership working to meet the health, educational and social needs of children within placements;
- To operate within the framework of equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice. Children will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class in terms of service provision. Wherever possible children are matched within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, and where this is not possible, plans must be put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them; Children with disabilities are to be placed in an environment that recognises and caters for their disability, and at the same time promotes their social inclusion;

- To ensure staff and carers are well trained and competent in delivering a quality Fostering Service, including opportunities for continued learning and professional development. To ensure all staff and carers have completed safeguarding checks and have a valid DBS;
- To provide all staff and carers support and supervision with clear lines of accountability and management;
- To provide each Foster Carer a named allocated Supervising Social Worker;
- To work in collaboration with and provide advice on fostering issues to other colleagues in the Children and Young People's Service
- To ensure all complaints and allegations against carers/staff are investigated under departmental procedures in a timely fashion and lessons learned filter to improvements in future practice.

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The structure of the Fostering and Kinship Service and how it relates to the wider Council organisation is shown below.



STAFFING AND QUALIFICATIONS

The Registered Provider of the Fostering Service is the London Borough of Brent.

Kelli Eboji, Head of Service for LAC and Permanency, is the Agency Decision Maker.

The Registered Manager of the Fostering Service is Afzal Ahmed, Service Manager for LAC and Permanency.

Elena Müller, Service Manager for Fostering, Kinship and Contact has management oversight of these three teams and is the Agency Advisor for Fostering and Adoption in Brent and quality assures all paperwork regarding foster carers' approvals, reviews and terminations, and children's permanence plans. The Agency Advisor advises the Fostering Panel to ensure it is fully compliant with all current legislation and statutory guidance and that all panel members are provided with annual training with the fostering social work teams and kept up to date with current research in the field.

Divya Jolly is the Team Manager of the Kinship Care Team. This team comprises:

- 8 x Social Workers
- 1 x Practice Consultant Social Worker

Diana Adigbli is the Team Manager of the Fostering Support and Assessment Team.

This team comprises:

- 7 x Social Workers
- 1 x Fostering Recruitment Officer

The managers within the service are all qualified Social Workers, registered by Social Work England, with extensive experience (a minimum of 2 years post-qualifying practice) in children and families' social work.

Similarly, all assessing and supervising social work staff within the teams are professionally qualified and registered with Social Work England.

OUR SERVICE TO CHILDREN

The primary purpose of the Fostering Service is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster families for children who are unable to live with their parents. Whenever possible and where it is safe to do so, children will be placed with someone in their extended family or a close family friend. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as 'family and friends' foster placements. Where this is not possible, placements will be found with one of our approved foster carers or a suitable foster carer approved by an Independent Fostering Agency. We aim to clearly identify the emotional, physical, cultural and religious needs of a child and find a foster family who can best meet those needs.

Except in emergencies, we plan introductory meetings between the child and the foster carers in an effort to lessen the anxiety for the child of moving to a new family. Where a child is placed in an emergency the child's Social Worker or the foster carer's Supervising Social Worker will give the child as much information about the foster carers and their household as possible.

Children will be seen in placement by both their own Social Worker and the foster carer's Supervising Social Worker. Children will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about their foster placement, and they will be invited to contribute in writing to their foster carer's annual review. The foster carers' own children are also invited to contribute to their parents' foster carer's annual review.

CHILDREN'S GUIDES

There are a number of Children's Guides devised for children of different ages accessing Brent's Fostering Service. One Children's Guide is aimed at children aged 5 to 10 years, one for children over 11 years and one for children placed with 'family and friends' foster carers. All children placed with foster carers are provided with the relevant copy of the Children's Guide. Their aim is to provide information about what it means to be fostered, the role and responsibilities of the social workers and what children can do if they are not happy in their foster home and/or have any worries and concerns.

Younger children are introduced to the concept of fostering by their social worker who are expected to engage with them via direct work (play) techniques to aid their understanding.

HOW BRENT'S FOSTERING SERVICE OPERATES

The Fostering Support and Assessment Team (FSAT)

FSAT are responsible for the recruitment, assessment, supervision and support of foster carers for the London Borough of Brent.

Brent has a widely diverse community; recruitment activity and assessment processes respond positively to the diversity and differences in child rearing practices, family values and attitudes in order to recruit from a wide pool of carers across the different spectrums of racial, cultural, religious and social classes living in Brent.

FSAT has a rolling programme of recruitment activity, on-going publicity, online and offline marketing campaigns coordinated by the Fostering Recruitment Officer in collaboration with the Marketing Officer based in the Communication Team and supported by FSAT social workers, team managers and approved foster carers in order to raise awareness of fostering and recruit more foster carers.

All successful applicants are assessed, trained and prepared to care for children who become looked after in Brent. Foster carers are approved to care for children as either short term or long-term carers.

FSAT supports the foster carers' development; a varied specialist training programme is available to equip them with the tools to care for vulnerable children and young people. Brent foster carers, including 'family and friends' foster carers are also invited to attend the courses on Brent staff learning and development programme. The expectation is that all foster carers will undertake a minimum of 4 learning events per year and attend the monthly support groups.

All foster carers, including 'family and friends' foster carers, are allocated a supervising social worker, the role of whom is to monitor the placement and offer support, advice and guidance to the carers.

FSAT responds to planned and unplanned requests for placements. Foster carers are specifically recruited and approved on the basis of the service they will provide. During the assessment process and final approval, consideration is given to the impact placements will have and the capabilities/skills of carers. Thus emergency and unplanned placements are

directed towards carers with appropriate skills and capabilities.

FSAT works closely with Brent's Commissioning and Resource Team, Looked After Children (Care Planning) Teams, Care Leavers' Teams and Locality Teams in identifying appropriate placements for Brent's looked after children. Where a placement cannot be made with a Brent foster carer, the commissioning of placements from independent fostering agencies is managed and monitored by Commissioning and Resource Team as outlined below.

Kinship Care Team

The Kinship Care team is responsible for all assessments of Connected Person(s) Carers (family and friends foster carers). Once approved, the carers are then transferred to FSAT for supervision and support.

The Kinship Care team is also responsible for all Special Guardianship assessments, whether they are directed as part of public care proceedings or private applications, and the assessment and monitoring of Private Fostering arrangements.

SUPPORTING TEAMS

Commissioning and Resource Team (CRT)

CRT identify foster placements, providing social workers with options to allow them to match appropriately to best meet the needs of the child/young person. This includes short terms, long term, respite, emergency and supported accommodation.

CRT is located within the Forward Planning Performance & Partnerships Service structure but co-located with the Looked After Children and Permanency Service.

CRT respond to placement requests from social workers and managers in the Localities, Looked After Children and Permanency and Disabled Children and Young People's Services for finding placements within Brent's Fostering Service for children and young people aged 0-18, quality assuring all potential matches before suggesting appropriate carers for these children.

CRT also identifies placements for children and young people in residential units, semi-independent accommodation services for young people aged 16+, or with Independent Fostering Services carers (if a suitable Brent alternative cannot be identified). CRT undertakes a quality assurance role in relation to these providers, including evaluation/safeguarding forms and monitoring visits to these providers.

CRT manages the financial contracts for Brent Foster Carers, residential units, semi-independent units and Independent Fostering Services, undertake initial financial assessments for adopters and review assessments for adopters and Special Guardians.

Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST)

FSAT works with and consults Brent's Wellbeing and Emotional Support Team (WEST), a Tier 2 child and adolescent mental health service within the Brent Inclusion Service, offering a targeted mental health and emotional wellbeing service for vulnerable children and young people. This includes the provision of individual and group support for social workers working with, and foster carers caring for, children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as offering specialist, therapeutically informed support during fostering assessments.

Private Fostering

The Kinship Care Team take the lead role in ensuring that Brent is able to fulfil its statutory duty in relation to Private Fostering arrangements, under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005. The Private Fostering social worker works closely with Brent Family Front Door, who are responsible for responding to notifications regarding potential private fostering arrangements. The team operates a duty system, from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, on **020 8937 4300, option 1**, to ensure that any potential applicant is able to have an immediate response to their enquiry and to answer any general queries they may have.

A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately (without the involvement of a local authority) for the care of a child under the age of 16 (or under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative for 28 days or more. The children Act 1989 defines 'close relative' as a grandparent, sister, brother, step-parent, uncle or aunt (by blood or marriage).

Responsibilities of the local authority:

Brent does not formally approve or register private foster carers. However, it is the duty of local authority to assess and ensure that the welfare of children who are, or will be, privately fostered within Brent area are being, or will be, satisfactorily safeguarded and their needs met.

Oluwasemilore Durugo, Service Manager for Brent Family Front Door (BFFD) and No Recourse to Public Funds, and Elena Müller, Service Manager for the Fostering Service, share the duty of promoting awareness of private fostering with other professionals, private agencies and in the local community.

The Kinship Care team are responsible for the assessment, monitoring and reviewing of Private Fostering arrangements.

Responsibilities of the private foster carer:

The private foster carer is responsible for providing the day-to-day care of the child in a way which will promote and safeguard their welfare but the overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the privately fostered child remains with their parent or any other person with parental responsibility.

Duty and Emergency Duty

The Fostering Service operates a duty system during office hours (9am – 5pm) Monday to Friday, providing advice and support to Foster Carers and Family and Friends Foster Carers when their allocated Supervising Social Workers are unavailable.

The Brent Emergency Duty Team (EDT) provides advice and support to looked after children and Foster Carers where there is a situation that requires an immediate response out of normal office hours (5pm – 9am). EDT also deals with emergency admissions of children to care.

Additional Support Services

The work of the Fostering Service is well supported by a wide range of internal services

such as Brent Legal Services, Virtual School, Finance and Human Resources as well as external services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Looked After Children Health provision.

West London Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme

Brent is currently working with Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Councils, in an 18-month DfE funded project to increase the number of children looked after in West London with high quality, support foster carers. This project includes a fostering recruitment support hub(Fostering Front Door), a regional foster care recruitment communications campaign and funding to implement the "Mockingbird" model.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring

A report is written for the Corporate Parenting Committee on a six-monthly basis by the Fostering Service Manager, providing the executive of the council with statistical and performance data in relation to the Fostering Service's activity.

Other monitoring methods include:

- staff supervision linked to the appraisal system;
- monthly recorded supervisory visits to foster carers;
- annual reviews of foster carers, chaired by independent Fostering Reviewing Officers;
- review and challenge offered by Brent's Fostering Panel, providing feedback to the Agency Decision Maker as to the quality of the reports submitted and care offered by Brent's foster carers;
- feedback from training sessions;
- practice audits;
- monthly performance meetings
- placement stability meetings, chaired by a Social Work Practice Consultant;
- FSAT managers monitor data about incidents of concern in foster care (including restraint, allegations, complaints, standards of care, and unauthorised absences); and
- The Registered Manager monitors the Schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

Evaluating the Service

The information gathered through bi-annual and annual reports, audits, inspections and customer feedback is evaluated by the managers, Service Manager and Head of Service of the Fostering Service, to judge its ongoing effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

The Fostering Service is also subject to formal inspection by Ofsted as per the ILACS framework.

The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains a 'Central List' of Panel members. The Panel Chair is an independent person with professional experience of fostering. Other panel members on the central list include: Social Workers with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience; a Brent Councillor; three ex-looked after young people; one foster carer; independent members with experience of fostering, mental health practitioner, Virtual School and the agency medical advisor. The Panel meets on the first and third Friday of every month and additional panels are held as and when needed to ensure that cases are heard in a timely manner. Detailed minutes are kept of all Panel meetings.

The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- each application and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer, or 'family and friends' foster carer and the terms of their approval;
- the first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the Fostering Service;
- the termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer; and
- the long-term fostering matches of children aged under 12 years.

New applicants and existing foster carers are always invited and encouraged to attend Panel when their application or review is presented to Panel.

The Panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it, feeding back any evidence of good practice or concerns to the Agency Decision Maker and Registered Manager. The Panel makes recommendations to the Fostering Service and these recommendations are referred to the 'Agency Decision Maker' for a decision.

If the Panel or the Agency Decision Maker is minded not to recommend approval or recommends termination of approval, applicants are advised that they can request that their case is reconsidered by the Panel or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review of their case.

THE FOSTER CARER CHARTER

Brent Foster Carer Charter - "Children are at the heart of our work"

Brent's Fostering Service is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances are positive for looked after children. In order to achieve this, it is important to have a working relationship which is based on trust and respect among all children services that are involved in the care of the child.

The service has worked in partnership with foster carers to achieve the charter, which was launched in 2012 and is reviewed annually. The charter explains what the roles and responsibilities are of the Service and the carers towards each other and the children we care for.

COMPLAINTS

All complaints and queries will be dealt with in a manner that meets Brent local and national requirements, as per the Children Act 1989.

Children are made aware of the complaints procedure, independent advocacy services, and of their right to make representations and complaints. This information is contained in the Children's Guides.

Birth families and carers will be advised of the complaints procedure and their right to make representations and complaints.

OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Fostering Service procedures can be found at:

https://www.proceduresonline.com/brent/chservices/contents.html#fostering_adopt

FOSTER CARERS' HANDBOOK

All approved Foster Carers are provided with a link to the online [Foster Carer Handbook](#), which contains all the policies and procedures relating to foster carers, as well as useful information about child care issues and resources.

FAIRNESS AND DIVERSITY

The Fostering Service works within Brent Council's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028. The overarching focus of the strategy is "inclusivity", how well the contributions, presence, and perspectives of different groups of people are valued and integrated into an environment, with three key objectives:

- Inclusion: Accessibility and Cohesion
- Narrowing the Gap: Tackling Inequalities
- Establishing an Inclusive Workforce

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE REVISION AND CIRCULATION OF THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Service Manager is responsible for the annual revision of the Statement of Purpose. Revisions may occur at other times if necessary. Staff and Foster Carers will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

The revised Statement of Purpose will be presented to the Fostering Panel annually for their consideration.

The revised Statement of Purpose will be sent to Ofsted annually and when any significant changes have been made, within 28 days of approval by the Registered Provider.

The Statement of Purpose will be available to all staff and members of the public via Brent Council's website. Paper copies can be provided to looked after children and their parents on request.

Useful Contacts

<p>Fostering Support and Assessment Team, Looked After Children and Permanency, Children and Young People's Service, Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley HA9 0FJ Tel: 020 8937 4538 Email: fostering@brent.gov.uk Website: www.brent.gov.uk/fostering</p>	<p>The Independent Review Mechanism Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, Leeds LS12 6AJ Tel: 0113 202 2080 or 0845 450 3956 (local rate) Email: irm@irm.org.uk Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism</p>
<p>Fostering Network 87 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HA Tel: 020 7620 6400 Email: info@fostering.net Website: www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/</p>	<p>Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Website: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted</p>