

Hertfordshire's Mockingbird procedures

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INTRODUCTION

The Purpose and Key Principles of Mockingbird

The objective of the Mockingbird is to create a community of support for children in foster care and their foster carers. The model's structure is designed to address specific systemic gaps found to be particularly damaging to children and young people in care including active safeguarding, placement stability, sibling contact and birth family involvement.

The following key principles are the aim of a Mockingbird Hub.

- **Unconditional care**—ensuring environments where children and young people thrive.
- **Normalisation of care**—providing the same types of opportunities, supports and challenges to children and young people in care as their peers who are not in care.
- **Community-based care**—in the most appropriate living environment.
- **Continuity of care**—same community, same school, same leisure/hobbies.
- **Birth family viewed as future support**—children and young people are taught the skills and boundaries necessary to establish and maintain family relationships.
- **Cultural relevancy**—embedded into the foster care household/community/environment.
- **Foster Care support**—taking good care of the people who take good care of the children and young people.

The subsequent protocol delineates the key features, expectations, roles and responsibilities required to implement Mockingbird with integrity in the context of Hertfordshire County council operating policies, procedures and processes.

Population Served

Hertfordshire County Council approved foster carers and their looked after children.

Mockingbird Hubs are supported and guided by this procedure. The service must make all efforts to ensure the needs of children and young people and their approved foster carers can be met by the hub. In particular, the service must ensure adequate training and support for the hub home foster carer and must be satisfied by that adequate support and supervision arrangements are in place.

Hertfordshire County Council has agreed to develop and implement Mockingbird in partnership with The Fostering Network.

APPROVAL OF MOCKINGBIRD FOSTER CARERS

All foster carers will be approved in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011 as amended by the Care Planning, Placement and Review and Fostering Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2013.

Hub foster carers are expected to sign a specific Mockingbird hub foster carer agreement.

Satellite foster carers are expected to sign a specific Mockingbird satellite foster carer agreement.

As part of Mockingbird support, Mockingbird hub foster carers offer sleepovers for all children who are part of their hub. Hub foster carers are approved for 3 children.

Sleep overs up to and including 3 nights can be agreed between the hub foster carer and satellite foster carer (if it's in the child's best interest). However, if a satellite foster carer has requested a sleep over longer than this, it must first be agreed by the fostering service and the CLA team and the hub foster carer.

If a child is placed with a hub foster carer (outside of the hub foster carers approval terms), there is no requirement for an exemption to be made for up to 3 days sleepover. If the same child remains placed with the hub foster carer for more than 3 days, then the usual variation/exemption procedures apply.

Allegations

All allegations will be dealt with in accordance with Hertfordshire County Council procedures.

Hub foster carers caring for children

Foster carers can be considered to become Hub foster carers if they have 1 child placed with them long term and there are no concerns about the stability of the placement and agreement has been given by the child's social worker. 2 children can be agreed in exceptional circumstances, agreement must be given by the service manager and the CLA team.

If this placement becomes unstable whilst the foster carer is in the hub foster carer role, priority should always be given to the child living in the hub home. That can mean that the hub foster carer may need to temporarily cease the hub role in order to stabilise the placement.

Hub home foster carers will not be permitted to have another child matched to them who is not already part of their hub.

PLACEMENTS

Goal

The Mockingbird placement objectives are to place children with foster families (Satellite families) within Hubs and promote placement stability and improved outcomes for all looked after children. The Mockingbird also aims to improve support offered to foster carers. In addition to the above, Mockingbird placement objectives seek to keep siblings together by either placing in the same Satellite home or with Satellite homes in the same Hub.

Placement Process into Mockingbird Hub Home

- a) Mockingbird Hub Home must have a minimum of 2 beds always open to provide ongoing sleepovers for the Satellite homes in the Hub.
- b) Mockingbird
- c) All satellite family placements joining the Mockingbird Hub constellation must have the approval of the Fostering Team manager.
- d) The Safeguarding out of hours Service staff **MUST NOT** place children/young people in the two open Mockingbird Hub Home beds unless placement into the Hub is underway i.e. part of the agreed plan for the child(ren)/young person. The Hub Home must not in any other circumstances be used for emergency placements.
- e) Placements must be made in a planned way with consideration given to the RAG rating of the satellite families.
- f) All satellite families must sign the satellite foster carer agreement upon joining a hub.

Referrals to Mockingbird Hubs

For all referrals to a Mockingbird hub, a referral form must be completed by the Supervising Social Worker, identifying which hub support is being requested. The referral should be reviewed by the liaison worker and hub foster carer in discussion with the team manager. If the referral is felt to be suitable and there is space within the hub then the liaison social worker and hub foster carer should visit the foster carers to discuss the Mockingbird and determine suitability (this includes sharing the satellite foster carer agreement). If all parties are happy to proceed then this should be discussed with the team manager for final approval.

In the instance where a referral is received but there is no space in the hub then the family will join a waiting list for the hub, held by the liaison worker. It is important to note that this is not a static waiting list, rather spaces will be allocated depending on the needs of the child and family, in line with the ethos of Mockingbird (for example siblings of a child already within the hub will be prioritised). The liaison worker should keep the mockingbird lead of any vacancies with the hubs.

Initial Placements into Satellite Homes within the Mockingbird Hub

The goals here are to place children wherever possible/practicable near their home community, unless to do so would jeopardise their safety, and to place siblings together.

At the initial placement of a child/young person in a Mockingbird Hub, the social workers for each child/young person in the Mockingbird Satellite Homes must provide all of the documentation as required by the Care Planning and Fostering Regulations and participate in preparing the Placement Plan. As per Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) policy, a placement planning meeting should be held within 5 working days of child moving into their new placement. The Hub foster carer should attend this meeting, a plan for the frequency of sleep overs should be discussed at this meeting and should be reviewed at CLA reviews. For Satellite families joining the hub with children already in placement, a Child Information sharing meeting will be held to include foster carer, hub foster carer, Mockingbird Liaison Social worker/Supervising social worker and Child's social worker. This meeting should take place within 1 month of the child joining the hub.

There should be an up to date child information sharing form for all children within the hub. When a child transfers between hubs all relevant documents including child information sharing form should be given to the new hub foster carer. This is also the case if a new hub foster carer takes over an existing hub. It is the responsibility of the hub foster carer to ensure that they have a current child information sharing document for each child.

It is crucial that careful consideration is taken of the matching of children in the hub, i.e. considering age, gender, and risks. The complexities and needs of all the children placed in the hub must be considered.

Placement Stability Intervention in the Mockingbird Hub

The Mockingbird placement goal is to maintain placement stability within the initial Mockingbird Satellite Home family. When there are concerns about possible placement instability all possible resources should be explored, first from the Hub Home and then from the Mockingbird Hub/Satellite Home families. This might include:

- a) Hub Home's providing early problem solving, conflict resolution and/or sleepovers.
- b) Hub home foster carer attempts to attend all meetings for all children in the hub
- c) A Placement support meeting will be held at the earliest opportunity to include hub home foster carer and relevant satellite foster carer, child in placement if appropriate, CLA social worker and manager, Mockingbird liaison Social Worker, foster carer and Team manager, plus other involved professionals (i.e. school, ARC Fostering support, CAMHS, YOS etc). The purpose of the Placement support meeting is to look at what support can be offered to child and foster carers to promote placement stability. Please refer to HCC Placement stability Practice guidance

Potential for Placement Disruptions in the Mockingbird Hub

If placements within a Mockingbird hub are at risk of breaking down, the following steps are to be taken are:

- a) Mockingbird liaison Social worker to liaise closely with relevant CLA team and IRO for child.
- b) Hub Home making daily contact with Satellite Home family when there is high stress/threat of placement disruption.
- c) Hub Home providing extended sleep overs for child/young person in Hub Home until a suitable new placement has been found. The Hub Home foster carer will be paid the appropriate rate for such care. Within this time frame a placement support meeting will take place.
- d) If the child cannot be supported with extended sleepovers within the hub, then the Fostering manager in liaison with the Programme will consider whether other Mockingbird hubs can offer extended sleepover for the child if appropriate.
- e) The aim of Mockingbird is to create consistency and stability for the child, so if a placement disrupts, a consideration will be made as to whether the foster carers remain in the hub.

HUB HOME SUPPORT

The Hub homes will provide; but are not limited to, the following services and supports to satellite homes within their hub:

- a) Monthly hub meetings
- b) Crisis support to satellite foster carers as needed
- c) Regular social events for families, and children
- d) Organise regular training, mentoring and coaching activities
- e) Availability to provide transportation as needed for satellite children

- f) Disseminate information from the service to the satellite families (for example about service days, training offers).
- g) Support permanence planning for children
- h) Sleep overs, both planned and crisis
- i) Support and promote contact for children and young people in the hub with siblings, birth family and significant others. The contact could take place in the hub home if appropriate.
- j) Attend CLA reviews, PEP meetings, Placement support meetings and other relevant meetings where possible for children in the hub.
- k) Keep the Mockingbird liaison social worker up to date with hub activities and expenditures.

The Hub home provider shall complete the monthly evaluation within timescales agreed with the Host Service. This should be completed with the support of the Liaison Social Worker. From time to time HCC will complete their own surveys to evaluate mockingbird support, it is expected that hub foster carers encourage satellite families to complete this.

Hub home foster carers are expected to keep their liaison supervising social worker up to date with any information relating to the satellite foster carers within the hub, the satellite foster carers should understand that information must not be shared confidentially with the hub foster carer as there is an expectation that they will share relevant information during supervision. Where appropriate the hub foster carer will be asked to complete some feedback for the satellite foster carers annual reviews, this information will be limited to engagement with mockingbird support. Satellite foster carers will also be given the opportunity to contribute to hub foster carers annual reviews.

Hub foster carers must ensure children's records are in line with Hertfordshire Policy and Procedures for Sleep overs and for any other contact if agreed by child's social worker or supervising social worker. These should be passed to the supervising social worker, the child's social worker and the child's main foster carer.

The Hub home foster carers must keep an up to date Mockingbird Child's profile for all the children within the hub. This should include the child's health information, emergency contact details and any other relevant information.

The hub home foster carer is expected to attend the monthly hub foster carer support group and engage with training offered by the fostering network regarding the Mockingbird role.

Sleep overs

The Hub home offers planned and emergency sleep overs. Emergency Sleep overs take priority over planned sleepovers in the Hub Home. Any planned sleepovers could take place at a Mockingbird Satellite Home, provided any overnight stay is within the foster carer's

approval/registration or with an agreed variation. Sleep overs will be offered both during the week and at weekends.

The Hub foster carers will be responsible for informing the Mockingbird Liaison Social Worker of any sleepovers that will take place within the hub home.

Sleep overs are for the benefit of both the child and the foster carer, they must be purposeful and in the best interest of the child. Sleep overs at the hub home should not prevent the child having quality time in their main placement and should not disrupt home dynamics. The number of sleep overs offered by the hub home foster carer should not be written into support plans without the prior agreement of the service manager and the hub foster carer. The hub home foster carer is expected to offer sleep overs to all of the children within the hub and therefore it is unrealistic for all children to have a specific number of sleep overs requested each month and there is a risk of burn out to the hub foster carer. It is imperative that satellite families understand that the main purpose of Mockingbird is not for the benefit of sleepovers, rather it is to build a community of support for both foster carer and child. If frequent sleep over support is requested as part of the care plan, the fostering service should consider whether another sleep over foster carer should be used to support the child.

Sleep overs up to and including 3 nights can be agreed between the hub foster carer and satellite foster carer (if it is in the child's best interest). However, if a satellite foster carer has requested a sleep over longer than this, it must first be agreed by the fostering service and the CLA team and the hub foster carer.

The satellite foster carer should be taking their looked after child on holiday where they can. If agreed by the CLA team and the fostering team that they cannot take the young person on holiday then the hub foster carer can be approached to offer holiday cover. However, this must first be agreed by the Fostering team and the CLA team. If agreement is given by the fostering team and CLA team then the hub foster carer can be reasonably expected to care for a child for an extended period to support the child's continuity of care.

The safer caring plan should be updated to reflect any identified risks of any children sharing bedrooms in the hub home, this should be updated every time children join or leave the hub. The safer caring plan should outline if any children could or should not share bedrooms. It is acknowledged that apart of normalising children's experiences of foster care is that they may choose to share a bedroom with a friend during a sleep over at the hub home. Agreement must be sort from the supervising social worker foster carer and child looked after social worker prior to children sharing bedrooms in the hub home.

Children attending the hub home for a sleep over should be provided with adequate clothing for the entirety of their stay. If the hub foster carer deems the clothing to be inappropriate then the satellite foster carer should provide money to the hub foster carer from the clothing allowance for them to buy the necessary clothing.

Day Care

It is the expectation that Satellite foster carers use their network to meet day care needs for their looked after child in the first instance. However, if this is not possible then the hub foster carers will offer day care to children within the hub where needs arise. A longer period of day carer (over two weeks) will need to be continually reviewed by the fostering team. Hub foster carers are not expected to offer day care every day over that time. Hub foster carers are not expected to care for children whilst their foster carer works unless there are exceptional circumstances which have been agreed by the fostering service

Hub foster carers need to consider safer caring and health and safety when offering day care to multiple children.

Support for Permanence

If the Care Plan for a child/young person is to return home, move to adoption or to residential care, consideration on if the child/family can remain part of the extended constellation is required and where not feasible the duration of transition needs to be considered and a plan put in place.

Finance

The Mockingbird hub foster carers are paid an agreed Mockingbird payment and other allowances as outlined in the [foster carer payments document](#).

A Mockingbird hub foster carer will receive the Mockingbird payment on completing of the mockingbird hub foster carer and liaison worker training. This will be reviewed monthly until launch to determine if hub preparations remain underway and this payment is still appropriate. Hub foster carers will begin to receive the additional Mockingbird expenses after the launch. A mockingbird retainer payment prior to the training being undertaken may be made in exceptional circumstances on the discretion of the service manager.

The Mockingbird hub foster carers are also paid a hub activity allowance every 4 weeks which is expected to be kept in a separate bank account. Each hub foster carer will keep a record of the hub activity expenditure, which is being reviewed with their Mockingbird liaison social worker. In the event of the hub not spending the hub activity allowance in full and money is accrued, the hub activity allowance will be temporarily stopped if the amount accrued exceeds more than £500. Once the allowance has reduced, the payments will restart again. The activity allowance will be paid after the launch of the mockingbird hub.

Satellite families are expected to make reasonable contribution to mockingbird activities, in line with the payment document (this could be for example purchasing their child a drink at a mockingbird funded activity). They should not be reimbursed for travel expenses, unless the mileage falls outside the weekly transport allowance and agreement is given by the supervision social worker in discussion with the team manager.

Delegated authority

Information regarding delegated authority can be reviewed in [Hertfordshire County Councils delegated authority policy](#). Delegated Authority aims to normalise the experience of children growing up in care and reduce their sense of difference. When used effectively it should

minimise delay in decision making and maximise the child's opportunity to enjoy childhood and family life. A blanket approach is inappropriate given that each child has individual needs and each situation is different. There will be different levels of delegation depending on the child's situation, legal status and Care Plan.

Where appropriate delegated authority will remain with the child's primary foster carer. Hub foster carers can exercise delegated authority in times of medical emergencies, however, should strive to contact the primary foster carer/ child's social worker as soon as possible. Delegated authority must be discussed at the initial child information sharing meeting.

Foster Carers ceasing involvement with Mockingbird

Mockingbird Hub foster carers who take the decision to end their role as a hub foster carers, will need to inform their supervising social as soon as possible and give at least 2 months written notice, in order for the Fostering Service to make appropriate plans for the hub. If a new hub foster carer is found it is the responsibility of the existing hub foster carer to ensure all information regarding satellite families and their children are passed to the new hub foster carer. There must be a new information sharing meeting about all existing children within the hub and any new families joining. The meeting should include the previous hub foster carer (if possible), the foster carer, the liaison worker and supervising social worker.

If a Mockingbird Hub folds then there is no guarantee that a space will be found for the Satellite foster carer in a different hub.

Satellite foster carers who wish to leave the Mockingbird hub, will need to notify their supervising social worker and a discussion will need be held with regards to time scales, to ensure minimum disruption for the children in the hub.