

Fostering

Fostering Services

Statement of Purpose 2011



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fostering@towerhamlets.gov.uk

www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk

Lead Member

Name: Oliur Rahman

Signature:

Date:



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1. INTRODUCTION

The statement of purpose complies with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering (2011) and is operated in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (2011), which together forms the basis of the regulatory framework under section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The National Minimum Standards focus on delivering achievable outcomes for children.

This statement of purpose is written as a description of fostering arrangements for children looked after in Tower Hamlets and the services provided which would promote the achievement of these outcomes. There is a children's guide available, which the child receives at the point of placement and that is explained by the foster carer to the child in an accessible way.

Copies of the statement of purpose will be provided to those working in the Fostering service, Tower Hamlets Foster Association and all approved foster carers in Tower Hamlets. In addition the document will be posted on the Tower Hamlets' website.

Any comments or enquiries regarding this statement of purpose should be sent to Hilary Bull, Service manager, Children's Resources by telephone on 0207 364 3464 or email: hilary.bull@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Requests for a copy of this guide or the children's guide should be addressed to the child's social worker or the Fostering Team. Alternatively, this can be obtained from the website www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk

2. REGULATION

Tower Hamlets' fostering service is regulated by OFSTED and is subject to inspections at three yearly intervals. Inspection reports can be obtained from their website: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Or postal address:

OFSTED
Royal Exchange Buildings
St. Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA
Tel: 03001231231

Following an inspection in 2008, Tower Hamlets was judged to be an outstanding provider of fostering services.

3. FOSTERING SERVICES & FOSTERING PANEL

3.1 Status and constitution

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a local authority in relation to fostering services and looked after children.

The service works to ensure that equal opportunities are incorporated into all aspects of service delivery and all carers are recruited and supported on their basis to undertake the fostering task and the needs of the service regardless of race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

3.2 Foster Carers Charter

Although increasing the overall number of foster carers is important, it is also essential to consider other factors to ensure that Tower Hamlets is best able to meet the needs of children looked after, as stated in the Foster Carers' Charter. The charter highlights the need for carers to not only treat the foster child as they would their own, but has coined the phrase "pushy parent" to emphasize this role. Foster carers need to support their foster child and do all they can to make the placement work. Examples of this would be to take part in learning and development, use skills and approaches that make a positive impact and enable the child to reach his or her potential. This will contribute to placement stability in ensuring that placements do not break down.

4. MANAGEMENT

Tower Hamlets fostering service is based at Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG and is located within Children's Social Care under the management of Helen Lincoln, Service Head. Fostering is part of the Family Placements service, headed by Hilary Bull, Service Manager.

Contact details for the Head of Service and service managers within children's Social Care are as follows:

Helen Lincoln - Head of Children's Social Care
Tel: 0207 364 2213 or email: helen.lincoln@towerhamlets.gov.uk
Hilary Bull - Service Manager, Resources
Tel: 0207 364 3464 or email: hilary.bull@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Jenny Boyd - Service Manager, Children Looked After
Tel: 0207 364 2202 or email: jenny.boyd@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Paul McGee - Service Manager, Assessment and Early Intervention
Tel: 0207 364 2257 or email: paul.mcgee@towerhmalts.gov.uk

Khalida Khan - Service Manager, Health Partnerships
Tel: 0207 364 2129 or email: khalida.khan@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Ann Roach - Service Manager, Child Protection and Reviewing
Tel: 0207 364 2162 or email: ann.roach@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Sukriti Sen - Service Manager, Family Support and Protection
Tel: 0207 364 6218 or email: sukriti.sen@towerhamlets.gov.uk

All service and team managers are suitably qualified and have achieved or are in the process of achieving management qualifications such as DMS and MBAs.



5. THE TEAMS

Four Children Looked After Teams, two Advice and Assessment Teams, four Family Support and Protection teams, 1 Private Fostering Team and the Children with Disabilities Team are responsible for working with children in foster care.

There are four teams, each with their own manager, which deal with specific aspects of the fostering service. These are listed below with their managers. Team members and structures are detailed in the structure chart.

- Recruitment and Assessment Team: Theveshyra Fletcher
- Fostering Development Team: Ishara Bhagwathpersad
- Kinship Care Team: Sharon Rahman
- Access to Resources Team: Jacqui Kazemian

Phil Morgan is the Group Manager of both the Kinship Care team and the Access to Resources Team.

Each team has administrative support and there is a panel clerk who supports the functions of the Fostering Panel.

There are clear management arrangements in place in the absence of a team manager and these are known to all staff. On day-to-day issues a practice manager, other team manager or service manager can be consulted.

All social workers in the Family Placements Service hold professional qualifications (Social Work Degrees, DipSW, CQSW or CSS). Social workers are registered with the General Social Care Council and meet the minimum standards and regulations in relation to experience and knowledge. Registration with the council needs to be renewed every 3 years. All staff working with children are subject to three yearly CRB and VBS checks. Tower Hamlets is committed to continuing professional development and many social workers have achieved post-qualifying awards.

6. SERVICES PROVIDED

6.1 Recruitment and Assessment Team

The Recruitment and Assessment Team recruits, assesses and trains a range of applicants who apply to foster for Tower Hamlets, to meet the needs of children they provide care for. The team is responsible for the assessment of short term, long term, adolescent, mother and baby placements, remand and short breaks foster carers.

The team's approach is flexible in order to maximise the number of people eligible to foster. They do this by ensuring that applicants are able to meet the National Minimum Standards and will not pose any risk to children placed in their care. The team will primarily recruit foster carers who live within the area of the LA that is within a 10mile radius. These foster carers will effectively and efficiently be able to meet the needs of the children for whom the LA provides care. Enquiries are dealt with courteously and efficiently by staff that has knowledge of fostering. The team always treats enquiries fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect. Applicants are kept informed of the progress of their application.

The assessment process is clearly explained, including the qualities and skills required, the standards against which applicants are being assessed and the timescales involved. It is carried

out through home visits, observations and meetings with referees and family members. Comprehensive checks and references are undertaken to verify information supplied by the prospective foster carers. This meets the requirement of part 5, sec. 26(2) Fostering Services regulation 2011.

The Family Finding Co-ordinator analyses the current and future needs of the fostering service and designs marketing activities, which aim to meet these identified needs. Recruitment events in the community are arranged by the Community Worker, and are held on a regular basis. The outcome of events and other recruitment methods are analysed to inform future recruitment strategies. This is done by implementing an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers who would be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service.

After recommendations by the Fostering Panel and the ratification of the Agency Decision Maker, foster carers are transferred to the Fostering Development Team for ongoing support and supervision.

For more information regarding the team, contact the Team Manager, Theveshyra Fletcher on 0207 364 5443 or by email: theveshyra.fletcher@towerhamlets.gov.uk

6.2 Fostering Development Team

The Fostering Development Team supports foster carers and liaises with the child's social worker to provide quality care to children looked after by Tower Hamlets. Emotional and practical support and supervision is provided to foster carers through regular home visits and telephone calls, ensuring that children are provided with a safe and nurturing environment. Other support is given through the payment of fostering allowances, the loan of equipment, ongoing training and support groups. Additionally, there is a mentoring scheme, whereby experienced carers offer support to newly approved carers. Where difficulties arise outside of office hours, there is a dedicated Children's Services Out of Hours Team.

Foster carers are monitored throughout the year and reviewed annually. The reviewing process includes obtaining the views and comments of the foster carers' children, social workers, foster children, parents and the looked after children's reviewing officer. An independent chair leads these meetings and submits a report.

The team's aim is to assist all foster carers in fully meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering. The Fostering and Adoption Development Co-ordinator works with supervising social workers to support the professional development of foster carers, including the completion of a portfolio demonstrating their ability to meet the Training support and Development standards.

For more information regarding the team, contact the team manager, Ishara Bhagwathpersad on 0207 364 0920 or by email: ishara.bhagwathpersad@towerhamlets.gov.uk

6.3 Kinship Care Team

The Kinship Care Team works with connected persons and special guardians who are known to the child. The team was created as a result of Tower Hamlets' commitment to ensuring that where children are unable to live with their birth parents, the first priority is to consider whether there is a suitable placement within their extended family or friends network. Family group conferencing may be used to identify possible carers.

Where possible, the borough aims to support the children outside of the Children Looked After system. This can be under Special Guardianship, Residence Order of children in Need

arrangements. Where this becomes a permanent arrangement, relatives will be encouraged to apply for a Special Guardianship order, effectively giving the carer full parental responsibility for the child. In some cases, a young person may remain with a family member or friend who will be approved by the fostering panel as a family and friends foster carer.

The team undertakes the following tasks:

- Assessments and support of special guardians
- Support and assessment of family and friends carers as required by the fostering service regulations
- Support and advice to carers receiving residence order allowances where supervision orders are attached

Special guardianship assessments require 12 week timescales with an additional four weeks for the applicants to read and give feedback on the report. However, due to court deadlines, assessments need to be carried out within timescales of approximately 12 weeks. The assessment format is designed to meet court requirements with a particular focus on management of the child's needs, contact and risk assessment.

The team is responsible for ensuring that children receive good quality care and provides ongoing preparation and training, workshops, support groups, individual supervisory and support sessions, a duty service and financial support as appropriate. This support is provided to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child. In addition, the team ensures that any recommendations in the support plan are fulfilled.

Annual reviews of friends and family carers are presented to the fostering panel.

A looked after child can be placed with a connected person in an emergency for period not exceeding 16 weeks. During this time, the team will undertake the necessary checks and do the full approval process. However, if this approval process takes longer than 6 weeks, the case will be presented to the fostering panel for a further 8 week extension period.

For more information regarding the team, contact team manager, Sharon Rahman on 02073641327 or by email: sharon.rahman@towerhamlets.gov.uk

6.4 Access to Resources Team

The Access to Resources Team constitutes a single point of referral for advice on all placement issues regarding children aged 0-17. To provide this service they keep current information on:

- All available accommodation resources - including in-house foster and residential care as well as services in the independent sector
- Services which provide alternatives to a child becoming looked after

Tower Hamlets has a range of approved external providers who offer value for money and a high quality service and are accessed through the Pan London Contract.

For social workers there is a 'one stop shop' approach to accessing resources. Once clear about the service or funding requested, Access to Resources commit to responding with a progress report within office hours on the same day as the initial referral.

Placements with in-house foster carers are made in consultation with the Fostering Development Team.

Payments in relation to looked after children are authorised, certified, recorded and administered through the Access to Resources Team, including those to in-house carers and external providers.

For further information regarding the team, contact the Operations manager, Jacqui Kazieman on 020 7364 5446 or by email: jacqui.kazieman@towerhamlets.gov.uk

7. MANAGEMENT OF THE SERVICE

The service has a written plan, which details the proposed development of the service in line with national, council and service priorities; this is reviewed annually.

There is a comprehensive health and safety policy for foster carers, children and staff which cover all legal requirements.

Staff and foster carers have a copy of policies and working practices in respect of grievances and disciplinary matters, details of services offered, equal opportunities policy. Inspection reports are readily available and requests from OFSTED to supply data are complied with.

There is a written policy for keeping and retaining of case records and on storing and managing confidential information. All electronic and paper records are securely stored. There is a procedure for keeping records about allegations and complaints and they are clearly recorded on files of staff, foster carers and children - including details of investigation, conclusion reached and action taken.

7.1 Numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

The Recruitment and Assessment Team consists of a Team Manager, a Practice Manager, one full-time and one part-time Administrator, a Community Resource Officer, a Family Finding Co-ordinator, a Fostering and Adoption Development Co-ordinator, a Panel Administrator and five Social Workers, two of whom are part-time.

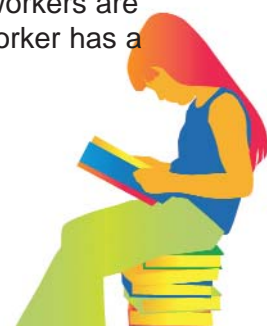
The Fostering Development Team consists of a Team Manager, a Practice Manager, an Administrator, nine Social Workers and two Social Work Assistants.

The Kinship Care Team consists of a Team Manager, four Social Workers, two Social Work Assistants and an Administrator.

The Access to Resources Team consists of an Operations Manager, an Information and Finance Manager, five Social Workers and five Administrators.

Both the Access to Resources and Kinship Care team report to a Group Manager, who is responsible to the Service Manager.

All social work staff have an appropriate qualification (Social Work Degree, DipSW, CQSW or CSS) and are registered with the GSCC. Many have achieved post qualifying awards. VBS checks are carried out on a regular basis. Recruitment and Assessment Team social workers are experienced in undertaking assessments and receive close supervision. Each social worker has a job description and person specification relevant to their role.



The experience and qualifications of Managers are detailed below:

Hilary Bull, Service Manager of Children's Resources. Her qualifications include BSc, CQSW and MA in Social Work. She has worked as a manager since January 1999. Firstly as a Unit Manager in the Family Placements Team for the London Borough of Bexley, then as a Senior Team Manager in the London Borough of Newham. Hilary was appointed as Service Manager, Children's Resources for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in July 2005.

Phil Morgan, Group Manager of the Access to Resources Team and Kinship Care Team achieved the CQSW and Diploma in Management Studies in 1985.

Theveshyra Fletcher, Manager of the Recruitment and Assessment Team achieved a BA in Social Work in 1997, BA Industrial Psychology (Honours) in 2003, Child Care Award 2006 and Certificate in Management Studies in 2010.

Ishara Bhagwathpersad, Manager of the Fostering Development Team achieved a BA Social Science (Social work) Honours in 1991, BA Industrial Psychology Honours in 2000, the Practice Teaching Award in 2005 and the Diploma in Management Studies in 2007.

Sharon Rahman, Manager of the Kinship Care Team achieved the CQSW and Diploma in Social Work in 1981. She holds a Practice Teaching Award and the Certificate in Management Studies.

Jacqui Kazieman, Manager of the Access to Resources Team achieved a CQSW in 1987, Child Care Award in 2001 and DMS in 2008.

7.2 Supervision, support and training of staff

Good quality, regularly evaluated training programmes enhance skills and keep staff up to date with professional and legal developments. Fostering social workers receive induction; post-qualifying and in-service training and areas for development are identified in annual appraisals. As a learning environment, the Family Placement Service encourages student placements. On a day to day level, staff has access to advice on medical, educational, childcare and legal issues.

Staff receives regular and ongoing supervision, which addresses accountability, the quality and timeliness of work undertaken and developmental needs. An annual appraisal reviews of social work progress and sets out a personal development plan. Written records are kept of supervisory discussions.

Social workers have knowledge of relevant legislation and current policies and procedures. In particular they have knowledge of child development and an ability to promote equality, diversity and human rights. They have an understanding of the roles of other agencies and work in partnership with health, education and the police as appropriate.

There are contingency plans in place to manage if there is a shortfall in staffing levels.

A written policy on case recording outlines the purpose, format and content of files and clarifies where different types of information are kept. The child's case record is recorded in a way which will be helpful to the child if they access their records in the future.



Foster carers are clear about the reasons the child is in foster carer, the duration and purpose of the placement and details of the child's legal status. The foster carer is given relevant information about the child and his or her family, which is needed for the appropriate care and safety of the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer themselves. Foster carers keep information in a secure manner.

8. RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

The service has a Family Finding Co-ordinator who designs a recruitment strategy, which is actioned in conjunction with the Community Resources Officer. A distinct fostering brand has been created and a website (www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk) provides potential foster carers with information and allows them to register their interest on line. A freephone number (0800 279 9850) has been set up for enquiries.

The ongoing campaign uses a range of media and builds on existing links with the local community to ensure the service recruits carers from a wide range of backgrounds. In addition, there is an incentive scheme for existing foster carers who recommend prospective carers, who are subsequently approved.

Statistics are kept to ensure that the forms of media which have been the most successful in attracting enquiries.

There is a range of material to aid the recruitment of foster carers, which includes a website, brochures and DVDs, all of which provide information on different types of care, the fostering task, the assessment process, support and training.

9. ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF FOSTER CARERS

The following process should take approximately 8 months from the time the initial visit is allocated to a social worker, and depending on whether or not the applicant is presented to the fostering panel. Following an initial enquiry, applicants will speak to a worker who will collect basic information including details about their accommodation, family composition and motivation. If both the applicant and the Recruitment and Assessment Team are in agreement that the application should proceed, an appointment for a more in depth discussion will be arranged to take place in the applicant's home.

If a mutual decision is made to continue with a full assessment, applicants will meet with a social worker over a period of time to work together evidence about their skills and knowledge which are relevant to fostering. They will also attend a three day preparation training group. The process involves discussing their own life experiences, including their childhood and relationships and how they brought up their own children (if any) as well as discussion about their understanding of the fostering task. It will also involve obtaining references from people who know them well, both professionals and friends and family, to confirm information given by the family. This is because the social worker is responsible for ensuring the wellbeing and safety of any foster child subsequently placed with the family.

The assessing social worker will use the information gathered to write a report, which identifies strengths and competencies, as well as areas for further development. The report will be shared with applicants before being submitted to the Fostering Panel who will make a recommendation to the agency decision-maker as to whether or not the applicants should be approved as foster carers and the age, number and gender of the children they can look after.

If the applicants are not approved or disagree with the approval details, they can make representations to the Fostering Panel or to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Between April 2010 and March 2011, 19 new foster carers were approved.

10. SUPERVISION, SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR FOSTER CARERS

Each foster carer is allocated and meets regularly with a supervising social worker (SSW), who provides individualised advice and support according to the needs of the foster carer in relation to the child in placement. There is at least one unannounced visit per year. Written records are kept of these meetings. There is an annual review of the foster carer, which includes the views of the foster child in placement, to establish whether the carers are still able to provide at least the level of care specified by the National Minimum Standards and to complete their professional development plan.

Foster carers are also invited to give their views about working with the department. The meeting is chaired by an independent reviewing officer, who submits a written report. The review documentation is presented to the fostering panel where it the first or every third review, where there has been a change of circumstances or an allegation. Otherwise, the review can be signed off by the panel chair. Foster carers are notified in writing of the outcome of the panel.

The role of the SSW is to offer supervision and support to increase competencies and skills, including ensuring the completion of a portfolio undertaken by the foster carer to demonstrate their ability to comply with the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers within 12 months of approval. Support is available from the Emergency Duty Team, outside office hours. Foster carers are given a copy of the Foster Carers' Handbook as a reference guide to relevant policies, procedures and guidance, legal, financial and insurance information.

Foster carers are encouraged to attend monthly support groups, which enable them to share experiences of fostering. Additionally, separate support groups for Bangladeshi, Black African and Caribbean carers and short break carers are held on a quarterly basis.

It is understood that fostering has an impact on the sons and daughters of foster carers and that they also need support. The supervising social worker will also ensure their views and feelings are sought. In addition, there are two support groups a year for sons and daughters, which include consideration of safer caring with a view to prevent the incidence of complaints and allegations. There is a comprehensive and annually evaluated programme of training for foster carers, which begins with pre-approval and induction training. Ongoing training includes both compulsory and optional courses. The content is devised with the needs of foster carers in mind, for instance, specific training for male foster carers with regard to safer caring. Convenient training times and venues are chosen and reasonable expenses are reimbursed. As foster carers become more experienced, they are encouraged to undertake NVQ in Childcare Level 3. Carers with suggestions for the training programme or who want a copy of the latest brochure can contact the Adoption and Fostering Development Co-ordinator, Estelle Shanley Davis on 0207 364 0945, or by email: estelle.shanleydavis@towerhamalets.gov.uk. Details of courses are also available on www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk in a designated area for Tower Hamlets foster carers.

Existing foster carers are involved in the pre-approval training and each successful applicant is allocated a mentor, who is an experienced foster carer able to give them additional guidance in the first months of their fostering career. Equality and diversity issues are integrated into all training courses.

Additional support is provided through the provision of insurance cover, appropriate equipment, a mentoring scheme for new carers, the Foster Carers' Association, support groups, planned breaks from caring, specific training about the health or other needs of individual children. Good communication between the child's social worker, the supervising social worker and the foster carer enables team working which promotes the best interests of the child. Carers are given a weekly allowance based on the age of the children they care for. This ranges from £275 - £425 per week. For full details on the payment structure contact Elaine Commons on 0207 364 5447 or by email: elaine.commonst@towerhamlets.gov.uk.

11. FOSTERING PANEL

The fostering panel and decision maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations and decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care. The role of the panel is to consider approvals of new applicants and approved carers and any terminations of approval.

Applicants seeking approval to become foster carers are presented to the fostering panel by their assessing social worker. The assessment report would have been shared with the applicant prior to the panel meeting. All applicants attend along with their assessing social worker. The panel is constituted according to the Fostering Services Regulations and, although it has ten members who sit on the panel. There is a pool of another 10 members who could be asked to sit on the panel. Some of the members are independent, whilst others are employees of Tower Hamlets who have a range of expertise in the field of fostering and childcare, such as health, education and disability. In addition, the membership includes a local councillor and a foster carer from another borough and a person who was previously a looked after child.

There is an independent chairperson, Arlene Weekes, and the Service Manager for Children's Resources is the vice chair. The panel adviser role is shared by Ishara Bagwathpersad, Team Manager of the Fostering Development Team and Theveshyra Fletcher, Team Manager of Recruitment and Assessment Team. Legal advice can be obtained from a designated officer in Legal Services. Although the National Minimum Standards do not stipulate that a medical adviser need be on the panel, Tower Hamlets feels that this, and the role of the education advisor, is important and should be maintained as part of the panel. All panel members have an up to date Criminal Record Bureau check.

The panel considers new approval applications for short term foster carers, family and friends foster carers, teenage foster carers, remand foster carers and short breaks carers for children with disabilities; the annual review of existing foster carers; matches between children and long term foster carers; and viability assessments for placements made with family and friends in an emergency. Applicants and foster carers are encouraged to attend panel when their case is being considered. Once approved by Tower Hamlets, foster carers can only work for this authority.

If a foster carer decides to resign, their approval will be terminated and their name removed from the Tower Hamlets Register of foster carers. If the panel considers that a foster carer is no longer suitable, the panel can recommend to the agency decision-maker that their role has been terminated. The agency decision-maker arrives at her decision independently of the panel.

Helen Lincoln, Head of Service, Children's Social Carer is the agency decision-maker for Tower Hamlets. Once applicants receive the written notification of the decision, they can, if they disagree, follow the representations of complaints procedure or contact the Independent Review mechanism.

Written policies and procedures set out the arrangements for panel meetings including quoracy; how urgent cases are dealt with; dealing with conflicts of interest; the recruitment of panel members; quality assurance; ensuring confidentiality; how to ensure consistency and fairness in reaching a recommendation. Currently, the quoracy amount needed is 5 panel members. Minutes are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed and record the recommendation and reasons and advice.

Joint training is held with panel members, social workers and foster carers.

12. NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS

On 31st March 2011, the Family Placement Service had 121 approved fostering households.

13. NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED

As of 31st March 2011, there were:

- 325 children in foster care in Tower Hamlets;
- 80 were placed with private agency foster carers;
- 124 children were placed with Tower Hamlets foster carers;
- 4 children were placed with family and friends foster carers and supported in the Kinship Care Team.

14. NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AND OUTCOMES

There is a written complaints procedure, which is in accordance with legal requirements and government guidance.

In 2010/11, we dealt with 13 formal complaints of which:

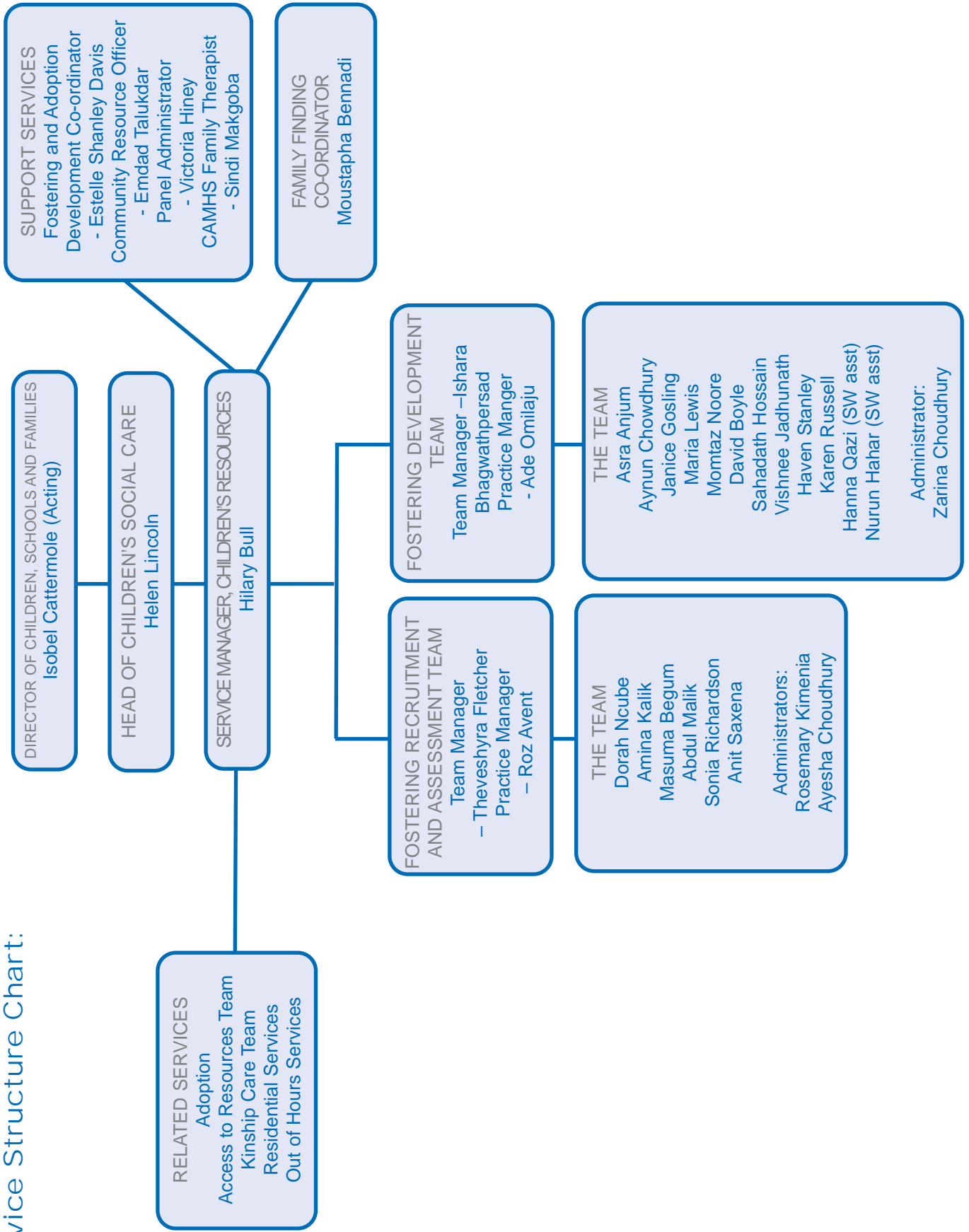
- 10 were resolved;
- 2 placements were terminated;
- 1 carer was deregistered.

15. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

If a child or young person makes a complaint about the services provided to them, then the Children Act complaints procedure must be followed.



Service Structure Chart:





Fostering

0800 279 9850

fostering@towerhamlets.gov.uk

www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk

London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Fostering Services
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
London E14 2BG

