

Caring for Our Children: Enhancing Fostering Provision and Support



A review by the Children, Families & Education Select Committee

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HILLINGDON
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Contents

	Page
Chair's Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
Terms of Reference	5
Summary of recommendations to Cabinet	6
Background to the review	7
Evidence and witness testimony	8
Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations	15
Background papers	18
Additional Resources	19
Appendices	20

Chair's Foreword



Foster care plays a vital and life changing role in ensuring that children who cannot live with their birth families are given the stability, care and belonging they deserve.

The Committee embarked on this review at a pivotal time for Hillingdon's fostering service – during a period of significant transformation and renewed ambition to strengthen our offer for both foster carers and the children they care for.

Throughout the course of this review, Members engaged with officers, foster carers, and young people whose lived experiences shaped our understanding in profound and meaningful ways. Their honesty, insight and willingness to share personal journeys helped us to see not only the strengths of our current provision but also the areas where focused improvement can make a real and lasting difference.

We heard powerful testimony from young people about the importance of feeling informed, understood and listened to. Their reflections reinforced the need for consistent, personalised information, strong matching processes, and supportive relationships that give them safety, confidence and hope for the future. We also heard from dedicated foster carers who give their time and energy to making a difference, while navigating challenges that highlight the need for greater commitment to support, training and peer networks.

The recommendations within this report are designed to be practical, meaningful and aligned with our shared responsibility as corporate parents. They focus on three key areas: elevating the voice and experience of young people, strengthening specialist training pathways for foster carers, and enhancing peer support for both carers and Cared for Children. Together, these changes aim to strengthen stability, improve outcomes and ensure that every young person in Hillingdon can thrive in a loving and supportive home environment.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this review, especially our young people whose input has been invaluable and is deeply appreciated. As well as to Democratic Services Officer, Ryan Dell for his support in organising the witness sessions and for diligently capturing the minutes of each meeting.

Councillor Heena Makwana
Chair of the Children, Families & Education Select Committee

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank all officers and witnesses for their valuable contributions to this review:

- Alex Coman, Director of Children's Safeguarding & Care
- Ash Knight, Children's Participation Team Manager
- Autumn Doyle-Field, Children's Participation Officer
- Councillor Colleen Sullivan, Fostering & Permanence Panel representative
- Donna Hugh, Assistant Director for Care Provision Services
- Foster carers
- Kathryn Angelini, Assistant Director for Education
- Lisa Steel, Virtual School Headteacher
- Natalie Craig, Service Manager – Care Delivery
- Young people

The Committee would like to especially thank the foster carers and young people for their important input into this review.

Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee from the outset of the review:

1. To understand the needs and experiences of children in foster care through examining demographics, underrepresented groups, placement types, placement stability, educational attainment, wellbeing and emerging trends.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of current recruitment and retention strategies, and support available to foster carers, including the impact of the new fostering offer.
3. To identify barriers to fostering for potential carers and Cared for Children, and to identify opportunities for improvement.
4. To formulate recommendations to Cabinet aimed at strengthening Hillingdon's fostering provision, thereby improving outcomes for Cared for Children.

Summary of recommendations to Cabinet

Through the witness sessions and evidence received during the detailed review, Members have agreed the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1

Develop an 'Introduction Pack for Children' that provides Cared For Children with clear, age appropriate, and accessible information to help them feel prepared, reassured and supported when starting a new placement and, where possible, during placement moves.

2

Include a 'Voice of the Child' section in the 'All About Me' profiles.

3

Include 'Where Are They Now' stories on the Council's website, where Care Experienced Young People share their experiences, if they are comfortable and willing to do so.

4

Review and develop the training programme to introduce specialist Foster Carer pathways, including pathways for carers specialising in supporting young people with complex needs. Include young people in co-produced training where appropriate.

5

Review existing peer support initiatives for both Foster Carers and Cared for Children, and develop opportunities to strengthen engagement and increase participation.

Background to the review

Context

Foster care plays a vital role in providing a safe, stable and nurturing environment for young people where they are unable to live with their birth families, and the Council has a statutory duty to ensure high-quality care and support for both foster carers and young people. Nationally, there is a shortage of foster carers, and local authorities are facing increasing pressure to meet the diverse needs of Cared for Children.

Reasons for review

Following discussion with officers it was noted that the Committee had focused on education and youth services in recent reviews, and that social care functions would benefit from a review on this occasion.

The fostering service is currently going through major transformation, and is a key project linked to delivering better outcomes for young people, and financial savings for the Council.

Furthermore, as the new fostering offer has recently been introduced, this was deemed an appropriate time to conduct this review.

Aims of review

This review aims to assess the effectiveness of the new fostering offer in Hillingdon and explore opportunities for further improvement through a focus on recruitment and retention; support for foster carers; and outcomes and experiences of Cared for Children.

The review also aims to assist in recruiting more foster carers; raising awareness of the benefits of fostering; and highlighting the positive outcomes it can have for young people.

Finally, the review aims to ensure that the service is responsive, inclusive and aligned with Corporate Parenting responsibilities so that all Cared for Children can live in stable, loving homes.

Evidence & Witness Testimony

Witness sessions

In agreeing the review's Terms of Reference, the Committee sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the new fostering offer; how this is being delivered; and how it is being received by foster carers and young people. The evidence received through these witness sessions is outlined below.

Witness session	Theme	Witnesses
Witness session 1 – 13 November 2025	Understanding fostering in Hillingdon	Director – Children's Safeguarding and Care Assistant Director for Care Provision Services Service Manager – Care Delivery Virtual School Headteacher Assistant Director for Education Fostering & Permanence Panel representative
Witness session 2a – 16 December 2025	Young peoples' experiences & best practise	6x Cared for Children and Care Experienced Young People Children's Participation Team Manager Children's Participation Officer Fostering & Permanence Panel representative
Witness session 2b – 04 December 2025	Foster carers' experiences & best practise	3x Foster carers

Table 1: Witness sessions

Witness session 1

During the first witness session, the Committee met with a wide range of officers who outlined the background to Hillingdon's fostering offer, including how it had grown, what it was achieving, and its ambitions for the future.

The Committee were advised that the fostering offer had been launched in May 2024 with a vision of improving the recruitment of foster carers and securing better outcomes for Cared for Children. Since then, interest had surged with enquiries rising by more than 120% compared with the previous year. Hillingdon was also part of the Foster with West London Hub and had received some of the highest numbers of enquiries (127) of all eight participating authorities. Over 20% of enquiries were converted to expressions of interest, while most rejections were due to unsuitable requests or living arrangements. Officers spoke with clear motivation: they wanted to secure the best possible carers because this is what young people deserved.

Alongside the Foster with West London Hub, Hillingdon had embraced new recruitment tools including the Care Friends app, introduced locally in September 2025. The app, originally launched in Wales, offered small financial incentives to encourage foster carers to refer new applicants. Hillingdon was leading the West London Hub leaderboard with 18 referrals, and other Councils had sought advice based on this success. The Committee heard that word-of-mouth was also an important strategy.

Since its launch at a recent appreciation event, the app had contributed to a 30% rise in new carers. It cast a wider net; gave existing carers a meaningful role in building the fostering community; and helped target recruitment for specialist placements. The Committee were informed that officers worked closely with the Communications team to promote the app and were already assessing a prospective carer who had been referred through it. Safeguarding remained paramount and no young person's details were ever shared, and the assessment process remained rigorous.

At the time of the witness session, Hillingdon had 78 fostering households with an expected 30 more to be approved before the end of the financial year, which represented an encouraging improvement. Carers ranged widely in background: 34 were single carers, the rest were couples; more than half identified as non-white; and ages spanned from 20 to 80, with one carer having fostered for 40 years. Officers were working to widen the ethnic and religious diversity of carers to better reflect the borough's communities and to provide young people with a broader range of placement options, including specialist and expert homes. 12 connected carers provided family link fostering for 17 young people, supporting wider sufficiency plans. For the first time, a parent-and-child foster carer had been recruited, and increasing this capacity was seen as an important part of future growth.

The Committee were informed that carers could earn up to £1,500 per week for supporting young people with additional needs, while also receiving annual energy bill contributions, Council Tax reductions, and reimbursement of Merlin passes to encourage positive, shared experiences.

Training and development formed another central pillar of support. Carers received trauma-informed training (see Appendix D) and had access to over 100 online and in-person courses, along with specialist consultations from the MAPS team. The assessment process itself was long, typically eight to nine months, and intentionally thorough to ensure commitment and suitability. Throughout this period, training and assessment ran hand-in-hand so that carers developed the skills needed from the outset. Officers emphasised the importance of supportive relationships between carers and their supervising social workers, particularly during difficult moments or transitions such as when young people move on to a new placement. To strengthen peer support, the buddy system was being re-launched, and regular events like coffee mornings helped build a community among carers. The Committee were advised that several newly approved carers were already going above and beyond for their young people.

Celebration and recognition were also key priorities. Foster carers were honoured at events such as the annual appreciation awards, where categories included resilience, sibling support, community impact, exceptional care, and long service awards recognising 10 and 40 years of commitment. A new bi-monthly 'Star by Far Award' had recently been introduced for carers who made an exceptional difference.

Feedback was constantly gathered from carers, young people and professionals to highlight what was working well and where further improvements could be made. Officers stressed their commitment to embedding learning into the fostering offer.

The Committee were informed that education officers from the Virtual School played a vital role in supporting young people aged 2–18 who were looked after. Each young person had a dedicated officer who coordinated their termly Personal Education Plan meetings, bringing

together carers, designated teachers, social workers and Virtual School staff to celebrate progress, understand challenges and set SMART targets. The voice of foster carers was central in these meetings, which took a holistic approach to stability at home and in school. The Virtual School also trained designated teachers on the lived experiences of Cared for Children and provided specialist workshops for foster carers ranging from supporting young people with challenging behaviours to helping them navigate natural transitions such as key stage and school changes.

Officers acknowledged the ongoing need to recruit and retain foster carers, as carers naturally retire or move on. Specialist recruitment for carers able to support adolescents or young people with additional needs had also become a priority. The wider care offer approach was closely aligned with Hillingdon's residential homes, but officers stressed that residential care was intended as a step, not a destination. The long-term goal was to support young people into family settings wherever possible, which made the recruitment of specialist carers even more critical.

The Committee was informed of the need for emergency and out-of-hours fostering. As a port authority, Hillingdon could receive young people arriving at Heathrow at unpredictable times, and officers were keen to recruit carers able to provide immediate, nurturing care so that no young person would need to remain at the airport. There was also a need for carers willing to take placements that arose overnight or at weekends.

To improve placement planning, Hillingdon was piloting a Fostering Placement Coordinator role to map available carers, young people's locations, and vacancies across care homes. Officers were also reviewing the previously piloted Mockingbird scheme, which created hubs of support through experienced carers, with a view to completing the review before Christmas.

The Committee was reassured that fostering was inclusive: same-sex couples were already fostering, and one such couple had provided a highly successful home for twins. Officers described how they supported carers whose circumstances changed, whether single carers entering new relationships or fostering couples splitting up. Reviews and updated assessments ensured that any new dynamics were explored with the needs of the young person firmly in focus, and cases were referred to the Fostering & Permanence Panel where appropriate.

Matching young people with carers was handled with care and sensitivity. 'All About Me' profiles (see Appendix C) helped carers understand the young person, and officers worked to ensure placements were suitable while challenging assumptions about identity or background. Sometimes young people thrived in families that did not match their cultural or personal identity but offered stability through experience and empathy. If a match was uncertain, officers created transition periods and involved supervising social workers and MAPS in supporting both the young person and the carer. Where a placement did not work, it was reviewed and alternative matches were explored.

The Committee were told that although the best place for a young person was with their birth family or extended network, this was not always possible. Foster care offered young people stability, a family environment, and continuity in their local communities, from schools and GPs to friendships and birth-family contact. It was rare for a young person in foster care to have no contact with their birth family, though sometimes this had to be supervised. This contact was promoted to retain a sense of identity and belonging for the young person. Over half of Hillingdon's Cared for Children were in foster placements. There was no fixed target number of carers, the

focus was on having the right carers with the right skills for the right young people. This is why officers were focusing the recruitment on specialist skills for carers for young people with additional needs and adolescents. As carers inevitably left or retired, recruitment remained essential. The greater the pool of carers, the greater the chance of making the best possible match and giving every young person the stability and support they deserved.

The full account of this session can be found [here](#).

Witness session 2a

During this private witness session, the Committee met with six young people who had experience of foster care. The young people were aged, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23 and 24. The following is a public summary of the session.

The Committee heard that some of the young people were still in touch with their foster carers. One young person told the Committee that their carer had supported them when no one else would.

The young people described a placement that was not a match based on their LGBTQ+ identity and had subsequently broken down, and so more training was needed for foster carers in understanding the young people and their identity.

The Committee were also informed that there needed to be better matching of personality and ethnicity. When young people were placed with carers of a different heritage, the carers often cannot teach the young people about their own heritage.

The young people noted that communication with them needed to be more open. They needed to know the reasons behind decisions and should have more input into discussions around their care. One young person advised the Committee of an occasion where they were not informed of the reasons for a change in placement that happened after they had been in the placement for five years.

Young people reported that foster carers were often not aware of their mental health needs and that this often represented an unsupported need. Young people suggested that social workers often did not understand what being in care is like, and that young people with lots of negative experiences should be matched with a social worker who had relevant experience. While there was a profile scheme, some of the young people were not aware of this. Previously, young people had been able to choose between two to three social workers, however this was no longer the case, in part due to capacity pressures.

The Committee heard occasions of young people being placed separately to their siblings and that contact with them was limited. Contact should be available to more than just the immediate family and be open to, for example, step-siblings. It was noted that some foster carers did facilitate additional family contact.

The young people suggested that if carers wanted the young person to move on, this happened very quickly, however if the young person wanted to move on, this was either slow or did not happen at all. Young people also needed to be taught practical skills earlier.

The young people suggested that, if they were foster carers, they would invest more time in the young person's culture and background and teaching the young person about this. It was important for foster carers to treat the young people as their own children.

The Committee asked the young people to rate their experience of foster care on a scale of 0-10:

- *From age 6-18, 10/10; around the age of 18, 4/10; now, 10/10*
- *-5*
- *7 or 8 as there has been ups and downs*
- *7 – overall positive*
- *0 – outcomes for this young person could have been better*

The Committee heard that there needed to be a more direct line to managers. After their social worker, young people often did not know a point B contact. The Committee were advised that young people should have their social worker's manager's contact details. The young people also highlighted high turnover of their allocated social worker, with some having experienced over 20 changes.

The Committee was informed that there were several Children in Care Council groups, including Talkers, Stepping Up and Stepping Out, for young people to network with each other. The largest event was KICA (Kids in Care Awards) where the young people were able to feel like a VIP for a day. There were also movie nights, parties, Pride events, Black History Month events and a 16+ football team. While there was a desire to hold more enrichment events, there were capacity, timing, and funding constraints. A group chat for just the young people would be helpful as this would help them to share experiences, learn new things, and ask advice from people their own age. All young people were care siblings with shared experiences and often understood each other's backgrounds where these were not always understood by teachers or professionals. There were national anonymous call lines available if needed.

The Committee heard young peoples' suggestions for improving the recruitment process. Carers needed knowledge and training in how to support the young people, and also how to support themselves in challenging times or if there was any trauma in the carer's background. Foster carers also needed more information about the young people. While there was an 'All About Me' profile, these had previously not been very tailored. Foster carers can judge the young person based on this form which was not fair on the young person. The Stepping Out Children in Care Council group had designed the form and these were completed with the young person wherever possible.

Young people described inconsistencies in pre-placement introductions with the foster family, and having little choice about their placements. One young person explained that until recently, they did not know the reason why they went into care – they felt that they should have been allowed to know the reason. It was suggested that a care package of water, fruit and tissues that is easily accessible to the young people would be useful at the start of new placements. Carers should have more experience of working with young people, and the challenges they may face. This could include volunteer experience prior to becoming a carer.

It was summarised that improvements could include: family placements to keep young people with their siblings; a focus on prevention rather than cure; explaining to the young people how foster carers are assessed; carers should have more experience with Cared for Children; experienced carers should train newer carers, for example through a buddy system or mentoring

to share ideas and experiences; and foster carers should be in contact with the young person's previous foster carer where possible.

The Committee also heard positive stories from the young people – some noted having good relationships with their foster carers, and referenced an experience where, although a placement had broken down, they were able to maintain contact with the carer. The young people explained that being in foster care allowed young people to experience what family life should be like, and described an experience whereby the foster family had given them a welcome pack of information about what it was like to live in the household.

As this was a private session, a full account is restricted to Members only.

Witness session 2b

This private session saw the Committee meet with three foster carers with experience of five months, five years, and 12 years as foster carers. One was a single carer, and the others were in fostering couples. The following is a public summary of the session.

The Committee heard that there were currently not enough foster carers, and matching on culture now appeared to be less common. There were also not enough social workers, and existing social workers faced heavy burdens and so were often unable to spend sufficient time with each young person. The carers suggested that each social worker was responsible for too many young people and that social workers have an extremely difficult job.

The carers described fostering as the most rewarding job but emphasised the importance of recruiting more carers, and that greater mental health support for young people was essential. Accessing respite was often difficult, even with advance notice.

The Committee were advised that, while the fostering process (see Appendix A) was self-explanatory, it was very long and approval took several months. It included weekly 1.5 hour meetings, Zoom meetings and home visits. The duration of the process caused some carers to think about whether they wanted to continue. The carers emphasised that they do not do it for the money.

One carer reported that they had not been made aware of all of their young person's medical needs, and that it was unclear if the Council was aware of them either. While the carer had raised concerns and suggested more assessments of the young person's needs, it had taken several months to get a response.

The Committee heard that many young people were unable to have contact with their birth families, and when such contact did occur, it was not always positive. Family contact was typically held at the Civic Centre within the Family Hub.

The foster carers described positive networking experiences, including meeting other carers at a recent awards event. There were also parent-baby meet ups at the Civic Centre and play groups available in the Family Hub. Carers noted that there had previously been a buddy system.

The Committee heard that additional training was necessary to help carers understand different types of young people and to support the development of specialist placements, such as for young

people with complex needs. The carers noted that it can be very challenging for one carer to look after multiple young people with different additional needs. All foster carers needed trauma-informed training, supported by additional specialist training where appropriate. This would help retain more long-term foster carers. The carers also felt that young people should be involved in the training, noting programmes such as Walking In Our Shoes.

The Committee were advised that themed events could be helpful depending on the needs of the young people. Although financial pressures were acknowledged, cross country networking could be beneficial. Carers highlighted young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system or becoming homeless and said foster carers were often not equipped to address these challenges without further support. Therefore, more prevention-focused training was required.

One foster carer told the Committee that some information about young people was withheld in order to secure a placement. Carers also stated that they often lacked information about young people's previous placements. 'All About Me' profiles should contain all available information as unknown behavioural challenges could pose risks to other young people in the home. The carers further suggested that placement breakdowns were more damaging than no placement at all.

The Committee heard that more realistic promotion of fostering was needed, and that highlighting promising stories would encourage more people to become foster carers and help attract the right applicants. Young people could be involved in promotion, sharing personal journeys to demonstrate the positive impact carers can make, such as 'where are they now' case studies.

The foster carers outlined several reasons for choosing to foster with Hillingdon rather than an agency. They explained that their motivation was not financial, that some lived in Hillingdon and preferred fostering locally. Another carer had initially approached Hillingdon because they were interested in mentoring.

Carers emphasised that foster care was a 24/7 commitment and noted the challenge of balancing the needs of fostered young people with those of their own children. They also highlighted the importance of developing the tools needed to set boundaries.

The Committee were informed that, after identifying additional needs of a young person, a query about backdating additional allowances for the newly identified needs was awaiting a reply. Carers also needed clearer information about what allowances could be spent on. Some reported feeling greedy for asking for more resources.

Although a handbook exists, carers said they needed more information about available resources. One carer had learned about a fostering network only after a placement had begun. Carers suggested partnering with the YMCA to allow young people to attend for free, which could also serve as a form of mentoring. Carers also proposed bringing young people together to work on projects of shared interest such as music which could be capable of generating income.

The Committee heard that there was a need to reach more prospective foster carers and improve accessibility to fostering information. There was also a need for more guidance about different types of care (such as fostering without a spare bedroom or as a single carer – see Appendix B), and more targeted recruitment of specific demographics including LGBTQ+ carers. Attracting younger foster carers would also support longevity and help carers relate better to young people.

As this was a private session, a full account is restricted to Members only.

Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations

The Committee asked to be kept up to date with statistics, and received the below additional information:

Number of children in internal foster placements	74
Average placement duration	This data is not currently available, though it would be beneficial for future reporting.
Approvals for 2025/26 to date	12 registrations
Deregistration/ resignations for 2025/26 to date	8
Total number of fostering households	71

Table 2: Fostering statistics (as of February 2026)

Note on considered recommendations

Some suggestions made at the private witness sessions included:

1. Improving advance notice to young people of decisions made
2. Widening family contact, including step-siblings and others
3. Implementing standardised handovers when young people's allocated social worker changed
4. Improving support for young people's wellbeing and transitions to adulthood

Following further investigation, these were discounted as these matters sat with social work teams rather than the fostering service and so were outside the scope of the review. Foster carers already received continuity through their own supervising social workers. However, Members emphasised the important role foster carers play in preparing young people for independence and agreed that this should be acknowledged.

There were a number of suggestions that were not taken forward as they were already in place. These included:

1. Standardised pre-placement information for carers – this was largely covered by the fostering handbook and financial policy
2. Pre-placement introductions – these already occurred where possible, though they were not possible for emergency placements
3. Matching considerations (identity, culture, household composition, sibling relationships, proximity to birth family) were already captured within 'All About Me' profiles
4. Website content already included strong material on foster carer experiences
5. Representation within the carer cohort was already strong among non-white carers, LGBTQ+ carers and single carers

Finally, there were some suggestions that were already in progress. These included:

1. Foster carer profiles – these would strengthen information sharing and improve matching and would be available to young people so they can learn more about potential carers. These would also enable young people to choose their preferred carer where multiple

- suitable matches were available
2. Expanded community engagement to support recruitment – while some outreach methods may not directly lead to increased recruitment, it is essential for raising awareness and challenging misconceptions

The Committee's final recommendations are outlined below.

Theme 1: Enhancing Information and the Voice of Young People

Findings

The review identified that 'All About Me' profiles (which outline background information about the young person) varied in quality, with some described as inconsistent or not sufficiently personalised.

The review also highlighted that the Council's website was static and did not always provide easily accessible information, with some carers reporting that they were unaware of available networks or resources when starting a placement.

Conclusions

A standardised information pathway including the voice of the child is required so that carers and young people are reliably informed, engaged and supported throughout placements.

Therefore, the Committee recommends the following:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1 | Develop an 'Introduction Pack for Children' that provides Cared For Children with clear, age appropriate, and accessible information to help them feel prepared, reassured and supported when starting a new placement and, where possible, during placement moves. |
| 2 | Include a 'Voice of the Child' section in the 'All About Me' profiles. |
| 3 | Include 'Where Are They Now' stories on the Council's website, where Care Experienced Young People share their experiences, if they are comfortable and willing to do so. |

Theme 2: Developing Specialist Training Pathways for Foster Carers

Findings

Witnesses identified gaps in training related to mental health, SEND, and identity & inclusion, which could affect confidence when caring for young people with more complex or varied needs. At the same time, demand for specialist carers, particularly for adolescents and those with more complex needs, continues to grow.

Young people highlighted the benefits of co-produced training shaped by lived experience (such as Walking In Our Shoes). Carers supporting multiple young people shared that additional, consistent and high-quality training would help them feel more prepared and supported.

Conclusions

Specialist training pathways and sustained development are needed to match the complexity of young people's needs and to prevent carer burnout and placement breakdown. Co-produced, lived-experience-informed training improves relevance, understanding and impact.

Therefore, the Committee recommends the following:

4

Review and develop the training programme to introduce specialist Foster Carer pathways, including pathways for carers specialising in supporting young people with complex needs. Include young people in co-produced training where appropriate.

Theme 3: Strengthening Peer Support to Sustain Foster Placements

Findings

Witnesses shared that peer support such as buddying, Mockingbird constellations and mentoring was a notable strength, providing practical guidance and emotional reassurance.

Conclusions

Early, preventative support is essential to sustaining placements and reducing breakdowns. Strong peer networks reduce isolation and spread good practice.

Therefore, the Committee recommends the following:

5

Review existing peer support initiatives for both Foster Carers and Cared for Children, and develop opportunities to strengthen engagement and increase participation.

Background papers

Key Legislation and Regulations:

- [Children Act 1989](#): outlines the responsibilities of local authorities in providing services for children in need.
- [Children Act 2004](#): emphasises five key outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being.
- [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#): outlines the standards and requirements for fostering services.
- [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#): focuses on the planning, monitoring and review of children's placements in foster care.
- [Care Leavers \(England\) Regulations 2010](#): covers arrangements for children leaving foster care.
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#): establishes seven corporate parenting principles that local authorities must follow to ensure they act in the best interests of children in their care.
- [National Minimum Standards \(NMS\)](#): provides best practice guidance for fostering agencies, setting out the minimum expectations for their services and operations, [according to Simply Fostering](#).
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#): outlines essential guidelines for multi-agency collaboration to protect and promote the welfare of children.

Additional Resources

Meet our foster carers

Read the stories behind some of our amazing foster carers in Hillingdon, available here:
<https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/our-foster-carers>

Fostering in Hillingdon | Foster with West London

Available here:
[Fostering in Hillingdon | Foster with West London](#)

Key National Helplines

Childline	 ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME childline.org.uk 0800 1111	Free, 24/7, confidential support	0800 1111
Always Heard (Coram Voice)	 getting young voices heard	Advocacy for children in care and care experienced young people	0808 800 5792
NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service)	 national youth advocacy service	Provides advocacy and legal support	0808 808 1001
The Mix		Support for under 25s on various issues	0808 808 4994
NSPCC Helpline		For concerns about a child's safety	0808 800 5000

Appendices

Appendix A – The fostering process

Appendix B – Fostering myths and questions

Appendix C – ‘All About Me’ template

Appendix D – Trauma informed practice

The Fostering Process

<https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/4756/The-fostering-process>

In this section

- 1. **Initial contact**
- 2. [Stage 1](#)
- 3. [Stage 2](#)
- 4. [What happens next?](#)


Initial contact

When you contact us, we will contact you within 2 days to give you more information about fostering.

If you meet the criteria, we will arrange to visit you at home to learn more about you and your interest in fostering. This will help you and us to decide if fostering is right for you and your family.

Following the visit, we will contact you to let you know if we would like you to continue with your enquiry and for you to let us know your decision about moving to the next stage.

There are 2 stages to becoming a foster carer.

[Next Stage 1](#) 

Stage 1

Application

- We will ask you to complete an application form, giving us consent to undertake the necessary checks to foster.


Checks and references


- We will start a series of checks, including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS police), personal references, partner (or former partner) checks (if applicable), education if you have school-aged children and with your employer (if applicable), as well as a medical check. There may also be other checks, depending on individual circumstances.
- All adults aged 18 and above in the household will also need DBS checks.
- You will be asked to make an appointment with your general practitioner to have a medical assessment.

Preparation training

- You will be invited to our Skills to Foster training, where you can learn alongside other applicants, find out more about the fostering role and decide if fostering is right for you. If it is a joint application, both applicants are required to attend. This training is delivered by our Fostering team and includes foster carers and previously looked after children.
- We will then arrange to meet with you to talk about moving to the next stage of assessment (Stage two). If this is right for you and your family, a social worker will be assigned to work with you to complete the final stage of preparation and assessment of you as foster carers.

Our aim is to complete stage 1 within 2 months.

 [Previous Initial contact](#)

[Next Stage 2](#) 

Stage 2

The Form F Assessment

- Also known as the Home Study, this assessment will help prepare you further for fostering.
- Your social worker will visit you on a regular basis to complete the assessment with you and members of your household.
- You will receive regular feedback from your assessing social worker and, together, you will determine if fostering is right for you and your family.
- Your assessing social worker will prepare a report based on the work you have undertaken together, this is called a Form F.

Hillingdon Fostering Panel


- To be approved as a foster carer, your Form F assessment is presented to the independent Hillingdon Fostering Panel, which you will be invited to attend with your assessing social worker.
- The panel will be familiar with your report.
- If fostering is right for you and your family, your approval as a foster carer will be considered by Hillingdon's Fostering Panel.

Agency decision maker approval

- The panel recommendation will be sent to the agency decision maker to review, along with the papers sent to panel, so that they can make the final decision about approving you as a foster carer.

Our aim is to complete stage 2 within 4 months but this can vary according to individual circumstances.

 **Previous**
[Stage 1](#)

Next 
[What happens next?](#)

In this section

1. [Initial contact](#)

2. [Stage 1](#)

3. [Stage 2](#)

4. **What happens next?**

What happens next?

If successful and you are approved as a foster carer with Hillingdon Council, you will receive a welcome pack and be assigned a supervising social worker, who will support and work with you in your new role.

At this point, you are eligible to foster and will be contacted when a child needs to be placed. This could be within a few days or weeks of your approval as a foster carer.

 **Previous**
[Stage 2](#)

Fostering myths and questions

<https://pre.hillingdon.gov.uk/fostering/fostering-myths-questions>

Separating the facts from the myths about fostering...

"I would love to foster, but I'm too old."

There is no maximum age to foster with Hillingdon Council - although applicants do need to be adults with relevant experience of childcare, and fit and healthy enough to look after children and young people.

"I'm renting at the moment and don't own my home."

You don't have to own your own home to be a foster carer. People who rent, live in housing association properties or social housing can foster, but you would need to have permission from your landlord. However, the council cannot accept candidates who have lodgers.

As long as your home is a safe, secure, stable and loving, you can apply to be a foster carer.

Additionally, each child or young person will need their own bedroom, but if you are fostering siblings they may be able to share a bedroom, depending on their gender or age.

"I don't have a spare bedroom."

If you're interested in fostering babies up to the age of 2, a baby can sleep in a cot placed in the foster carer's bedroom, as long as there is enough space.

"I don't think I can afford to foster."

Foster carers receive a weekly allowance for each child placed with them, and a fee for their work as a foster carer; ensuring foster carers will not be out of pocket.

The council's allowances and fees for their foster carers are competitive and higher than the national minimum.

Those who foster also receive a tax break, called foster care relief, and normally if a person is in receipt of benefits, this would not be affected by fostering.

"I'm single, can I foster?"

You don't have to be married or have a partner to be considered for fostering. Single men and women can offer different perspectives on life, and both can be great role models for children and young people in care.

If you are single, we would look at your support network and (if you are employed) how you would balance work with fostering.

"I identify as LGBT+. Will I be able to foster?"

Yes, you can foster if you are LGBT+. Your sexual orientation is part of your identity.

We consider the skills and childcare experience of the person - either through their own children, looking after friends or family members' children, or through work - and the ability to provide a safe and nurturing home to a child or young person. Those in foster care have different needs and challenges, and we welcome diversity among our foster care community.

We recognise the resilience, determination and the challenges that you have overcome. The law protects you and we welcome you.

"I enjoy my job and may not want to give it up to foster."

Many foster carers also work in some way outside of fostering, and are able to successfully combine working and fostering. It is also great for children to see parents or carers who are committed to their work.

The council would need to look at how flexible a person's job is and if they are available for children after school or during holiday time, as well as their support network.

If a person does wish to look after babies, they would need to be the main foster carer and be at home full time.

"I would consider fostering, but I'm not a parent."

You don't need to have had children of your own to foster. However, before someone can become a foster carer, the council would assess the person has relevant childcare experience.

It does not matter if this was gained through caring for their own children, or through their friends and/or family network, or perhaps through working with children and young people as part of their job.

The council also provides foster carers in Hillingdon access to a 3-day preparation training course called Skills to Foster, which covers the practical and specialist skills needed to look after fostered children.

"English isn't my first language. Am I able to foster?"

Children and young people in foster care come from different backgrounds and many may not have English as their first language. To foster in Hillingdon, a person needs a good level of spoken and written English, so they can support a child with their schoolwork, communicate with other professionals involved in the fostering process, and to be able to make notes and keep records as part of the role.

"I'd love to foster but I have a disability."

The councils welcome applicants living with a disability. Every person who applies is treated fairly and equally and the same checks are applied to all applicants.

Checks include a medical check to measure health and fitness, and provide the best standard of care to a child or young person. What is really important is that a person can provide a safe, secure and happy home - a person's disability should not be a barrier to fostering.

London Borough of Hillingdon All About Me

PLEASE ENSURE THIS DOCUMENT REMAINS ANONYMOUS THROUGHOUT

Child/ Young Person's Initials	
Date of Birth	
Gender / Identity	
Language spoken:	
Religion:	
Ethnicity:	
Legal Status:	
ICS number:	

Date Placement Required by:	
Area or Borough placement is required	

Placement requirement indicators - please tick one box:

Fostering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Early Permanence (Foster to Adopt)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Residential	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supported Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>
52 wk Specialist Residential School	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent & Child Assessment Unit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Solo / Enhanced	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reason why the placement is required and the likely duration? (including brief family history / background)	
What is the desired outcome of the placement? (Reference the exit plan)	

Child/ Young Person's description of themselves in their own words: N/A

Child or Young Person's Wishes and Feelings: (written by the social worker and/ or the child/ young person)

Please complete the following:

Child/ Young Person's Special Dietary Requirements - <i>include allergies etc</i>	
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What is the model of care requested for the child or young person:

Brief background Information relevant to the placement request and the reason why:

Are there other limitations or restrictions that need to be considered?	
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For example:

-Other children in the placement

-DOLS (Deprivation of Liberty) court order in place

Is there involvement with any other agencies that providers need to be aware of? (Police, YJS, Voluntary agencies, MAPS, CAMHS etc)	
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Family Time details	
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<p><i>Please provide details of any family time- the schedule, the people that time must be maintained with, the people for whom time is restricted with, or that the child or young person must not be in contact with.</i></p>	
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Education

<p>Name and address of educational establishment- Recently offered school placement at Oakwood school <i>Include any individual contact details - name & phone number</i> Year Group – this information must be provided</p>	
<p>Is the child or young person experiencing any of the following difficulties in education, or receiving any of the following support? <i>Please tick any that apply</i></p>	
<p>Not feeling able to engage with education</p>	
<p>Currently excluded</p>	
<p>At risk of exclusion</p>	
<p>Has an EHCP</p>	
<p>Has a Behaviour Support Plan</p>	
<p>Absent or not attending school</p>	
<p>Can the young person travel independently? (if the young person needs to be transported to school please indicate any specific needs associated with transport)</p>	
<p>Please provide any brief additional information here:</p>	

<p>Long term medical conditions <i>Please include description and main symptoms, not just the name of condition.</i></p>	
<p>Medication (Name, dosage, is it self-administered? Include any allergies to medication)</p>	
<p>Substance or Alcohol Use - include smoking. If yes, include details.</p>	
<p>Emotional Wellbeing</p>	

<p>Mental Health Conditions <i>Please include information about any self-harm or suicidal thoughts</i></p>	
<p>Eating Disorders <i>Please give details, including any historic or ongoing treatment</i></p>	
<p>ADHD/Autism <i>Please give details of diagnosis or stage of investigation, also any ongoing support from partner agencies. Attachment disorder of any type.</i></p>	
<p>Is the young person sexually active in their relationships and/ or at risk of pregnancy?</p>	
<p>Any brief additional Information</p>	

Disability

<p>Does the child or young person have a disability?</p>	
<p>Please provide details, including if or how this may impact on the child's day to day life. - Are there any physical needs, mobility issues, environmental adaptations that are needed.</p>	

Needs and behaviours

<i>Has a risk assessment been carried out? Include details.</i>	
Honour based violence	
Suspicion of trafficking	

Any other relevant information (such as additional risks not covered elsewhere)

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Social Worker Name and Signature:

Manager's Name and Signature:

Date completed:

Trauma-Informed Practice in Social Work and Care

In Hillingdon we approach Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) in two related ways. The Social Workers who are completing the assessments and plans are fully trained in Trauma Informed Practice and those providing care (residential and Foster Care) are fully trained in P.A.C.E. approach that is closely linked with TIP.

This briefing provides a brief description of both highlight the benefits to the children's outcomes and highlights how this supports our commitment to delivering the Care Offer to our children.

What is Trauma-Informed Practice?

Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) is an approach that recognises the impact of trauma on a person's life and behaviour. Instead of asking "*What's wrong with this child?*", it asks "*What has this child experienced?*". Trauma can result from abuse, neglect, loss, or violence, and it affects emotional regulation, relationships, and development.

TIP focuses on:

- **Understanding trauma** and its effects.
- **Creating safety and trust** in relationships.
- **Avoiding re-traumatisation.**
- **Empowering children and families** through choice and collaboration.

What is PACE?

PACE stands for **Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy**. It is a therapeutic parenting approach developed by Dr Dan Hughes, designed to help carers build strong, trusting relationships with children who have experienced trauma.

How PACE links to Trauma-Informed Practice:

- Both approaches start from understanding trauma and its impact.
- PACE gives carers practical tools to respond in ways that promote emotional safety and connection.
- It helps carers move away from punitive responses and towards curiosity and empathy, which are core principles of TIP.

How is it Embedded in Practice?

- **Social Work:** Practitioners use trauma-informed approaches in social work assessments, planning, direct work and observations. This includes building trust, reducing stress, and supporting emotional regulation whilst creating informed, relevant plans than meet the needs of our children.
- **Foster Carer Training:** Carers, through PACE, learn how trauma shapes behaviour and how to respond with empathy rather than punishment. Training covers:
 - Predictable routines.
 - Calm, supportive communication.
 - Techniques to help children manage emotions.
- **Staff Development:** All staff receive training to understand trauma's impact on children and themselves, reducing burnout and improving care consistency.

Why we are rolling out PACE to foster carers and residential staff:

- Children in care often struggle with trust and emotional regulation due to past trauma.
- PACE equips carers and staff to respond calmly and therapeutically, reducing placement breakdowns.
- It supports children's recovery, resilience, and long-term wellbeing by creating nurturing, predictable environments.
- Children in care often struggle with trust, emotional regulation, and behaviour because of past trauma. PACE gives carers practical tools to respond calmly and compassionately, rather than with punishment or frustration. This creates a safe, nurturing environment where children can heal and grow.

How PACE and TIP promote a Consistent Care Offer

- **Shared Language and Approach:** When both foster carers and residential staff use PACE, children experience the same style of care wherever they are. This consistency reduces confusion and anxiety and supports the move from residential homes into family based environment in Foster Care
- **Smooth Transitions:** Moving between residential settings and foster care can be stressful and often a difficult step for our children. A common approach (PACE)

means children don't have to "start over" with new rules, expectations, communication methods and behaviour management.

- **Consistent Standards:** PACE sets a clear standard for how adults interact with children—always with empathy, curiosity, and acceptance—so care feels predictable and supportive.

Why This Leads to Better Outcomes

- **Emotional Safety:** Children feel understood and valued, which builds trust.
- **Improved Behaviour:** When carers respond with curiosity instead of criticism, children learn to manage emotions better.
- **Stronger Relationships:** Consistent, nurturing care helps children form secure attachments.
- **Long-Term Resilience:** These experiences support mental health and development into adulthood.

In short, **PACE it's a way of working that ensures every child in care receives the same compassionate, trauma-informed support, no matter where they live.** This consistency is key to helping children recover from trauma and thrive.

Alex Coman

08 Jan 2026