

## **National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy**

### **Consultation Questions**

*Getting the placement right first time - improving the matching of placements to the needs of children and young people*

*1. Do you think that setting a maximum number of placements for each foster carer would improve the fostering experience of the child?*

Yes

No

If you've answered yes, please specify what the placement limit should be and please give reasons for your answer.

Barnardo's Scotland suggests that there should be a normal placement limit of 3 foster places. This should be set in regulations and would bring Scotland into line with England and Wales. There should be provision for exceptions in the cases where there are sibling groups involved or where a comprehensive package of care for children and young people with complex needs can be evidenced. There should be general monitoring of instances where the placement limit has been exceeded. There may also be arguments for exceeding placement limits for emergency periods, but care should be exercised in these instances, and there should be strict monitoring and review requirements.

Barnardo's Scotland believes that placement limits would increase the chances of stable placements and improved caring arrangements for children in substitute care settings.

*2. If introduced, setting a maximum number of placements would need to be phased in. What, in your opinion, would be a realistic timeframe for this?*

Barnardo's Scotland is aware that there are significant resource implications in suggesting placement limits. For this reason we suggest that the phasing should occur in the following sequence.

- An agreed date of implementation where no new placements will exceed 3 places
- An extension for placements of 3 or more beyond the implementation date, if this would unnecessarily disrupt a stable placement.

We believe that this will achieve the policy objectives. However, there is a need for further scoping to assess the likelihood of recruiting sufficient new foster placements for this measure. This scoping would need to take account of current and projected demand, projected supply of foster carers and timescales set for the achievement of a normal placement limit of 3 throughout Scotland.

*3. Are you aware of any examples of good practice that demonstrate how best to involve the child or young person in the choice of placement? If so please give further details.*

Barnardo's Scotland's overall comment on this is that in most instances we are a considerable way from routinely involving the child or young person in the choice of placement. It is our overwhelming experience that the scope for choice is very limited because of the pressure on placements.

However, we do have exceptional examples where the child has been involved in choice of placement. In our Home from Home service in Aberdeen we have an instance where we were involved a child specific recruitment drive. The child was involved in the wording of the advertisement and specifying the profile of foster parent being sought and ultimately the placement selected. It is worth noting that in this instance it was not an emergency, we were seeking a permanent placement and the young person was of an age where they could exercise a choice.

In our experience the matching panels are invariably professionally led and this limits the scope for a child or young person to have their voice or choice heard, even if this was an option.

*4. How do you think that the matching process could be improved (for instance, by combining the expertise of child protection and family placement services, or by using family group conferencing)?*

Barnardo's Scotland experience is that, overall, the matching process works well, once a placement has been identified for a child. Most local authorities have a clear process of a formal Linking Meeting where the identified needs of the child are considered alongside the strengths and skills of the potential carers. Informal information sharing meetings would then usually take place between social worker and potential carer, existing carers/potential carer etc. The minutes of the Linking Meeting would then be available to the Matching Panel where the formal recommendation for the matching is made.

However, the matching process is hindered by the lack of foster placements and choices available. Even where social workers and others use good assessment frameworks and identify children and young people's needs, resource constraints often influence matching.

The use of family group conferencing can be helpful in identifying alternatives to the need for fostering placements and for this reason should be considered in appropriate instances where a child or young person may have to be removed from home. It may also

help contribute to the assessment of what would be required to make a suitable placement. However, in terms of a successful matching process, family group conferencing would have a limited role because it has already been decided that the child or young person is moving from the care of the family home or wider network.

### ***Transition to adulthood and independent living***

*5. What improvements or changes do you think must be made to the current arrangements to enable young people to stay in their foster home beyond their 18th birthday, if they wish, or if it is appropriate?*

Barnardo's Scotland is concerned at the generally low age that young people leave care. In foster settings this issue is not as pressing an issue as that of young people leaving residential schools and homes, but it remains a concern. In our view many more foster placements could progress beyond 18 years if there was the finance to pay for it. We routinely remind placing authorities that under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, section 25, local authorities may provide accommodation for anyone aged between 18-21 years. Where the young person is looked after, under sections 29/30, placing authorities can assist and give financial assistance up to age 21 years. However there is a need for a more robust nationally recognised payment scheme that goes beyond the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Barnardo's Scotland has some excellent examples where payment has continued beyond a young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. For instance our Family Placement Service Team works with Alison, who is 18 years old and profoundly disabled, requiring 24 hour care. Alison has a comprehensive package of care including education, day-care, home-visiting and regular respite. Her life expectancy has increased and an experienced health visitor recently commented that she receives the best care and support she has ever seen in 25 years. The local authority continues to pay foster fees and allowances as well as funding other essential services. We expect Alison to remain with her current carer into adulthood.

### ***Amendments to Regulations***

*6. The Scottish Executive has made clear its commitment to amend the Arrangements to Look After Children Regulations 1996 and the Fostering of Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996.<sup>5</sup> We invite comments on the proposed amendments at Annex A.*

Barnardo's Scotland agrees with all of the proposed amendments, although we would be interested in further detail under 5, in respect of the assessed impact on agencies and how this would operate in practice.

#### Section 4 - Meeting the needs of foster carers

7. Do you agree that foster carers should be more closely involved in the development and review of a foster child's care plan?

- Yes  
 No

*If you've answered yes, what do you think are the best ways of involving them? (Please tell us about any **specific** examples of good practice you are aware of.)*

Barnardo's Scotland believes that foster carers will know the children for whom they care. We involve them routinely in core group meetings involving the child, social worker and link worker. Foster carers are involved contributing to assessments of the children in their care, formulating care plans and Pathway Plans. For example they are able to comment in detail on the children's behaviour and social development in the foster care setting. We have examples where foster carers are trained in assessing autism spectrum conditions and we have also developed carers recording formats.

#### **Remuneration for foster carers**

8. Do you agree that there should be a minimum or standard rate of fostering allowances?

Minimum rate of allowances  Yes  No

Standard rate of allowances  Yes  No

*If you've answered yes, please give your suggestions on how this should be calculated.*

Barnardo's Scotland supports a minimum rate and this should be set in line with the recommendations of The Fostering Network. This still leaves the capacity to pay more, but the risk of this is reduced as The Fostering Network rates are becoming a widely accepted norm.

9. Do you think that there should be a minimum or standard rate of fostering fees?

Minimum rate for fees  Yes  No

Standard rate for fees  Yes  No

*If you've answered yes', please give your suggestions on how this should be calculated.*

There are average costs available through the work of BAAF, The Fostering Network and DoH cost calculations. However, these should not be overly restrictive as this may prevent specialist provision for those children who require it.

Barnardo's suggests a three point scale based on the level of need of the child able to be accommodated by the foster parent.

*10. Do you think that financial support should include an element for replacing or purchasing one-off items, such as a washing machine or a car?*

Yes

No

*please give reasons for your answer*

This needs guidance, but the principle is that foster carers should be compensated for the tasks they undertake.

### ***Registration for foster carers***

*11. Do you think that registration of foster carers would enable them to improve their foster service?*

Yes

No

*If you've answered yes, please tell us what improvements could be achieved and what form the registration should take.*

There is a mixed view within Barnardo's as to the real benefits to be gained from registration of foster carers. We have answered yes although this is a cautious yes on the basis that it should ultimately raise the status of foster carers and give them a right to training which is patchy at present. We believe that this could result in a more highly skilled workforce and higher quality placements for children. On the other hand we are mindful of the current bureaucratic burdens on registered staff. As a consequence we strongly recommend that if registration is agreed special measures should be put in place that minimise the burden on foster carers.

We are also aware that registration will mean additional resource implications and this should be factored in if the registration of foster carers is introduced.

### ***Wider support for foster carers***

12. Regarding the introduction of a national protocol for dealing with and responding to allegations, please tell us about any **specific** proposals for what this should include. As an example you may wish to look at the resource produced by The Fostering Network for the Department of Education and Skills in England. <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice/IG00082/>.

Barnardo's Scotland agrees that needs to be a national protocol. However, this will only work if this is multi-agency and signed up to by all parties. There needs to be clear guidelines on the time limits for investigations; communication; support and advice for carer. Fostering Network has done a lot of useful work on this and their guidelines are comprehensive.

We have had highly complex situations at our Family Placement Service following an allegation where 3 different local authorities were involved, alongside ourselves, all with different procedures. A national protocol would be invaluable in these situations.

13. How should such protocols balance the rights of children and young people to have their allegations properly investigated with the needs of carers for timely and appropriate support and advice? What potential difficulties would there be in developing and implementing such a protocol?

14. What other information and support do you think would be helpful to carers in carrying out their job?

- A support network for children of foster carers
- A support network for foster carers
- A key worker for foster carers
- A regular training programme
- A helpline to contact when problems arise, such as an allegation

Anything else (please specify below)

## Section 5 - Family and friend carers - "Kinship Carers"

15. Do you consider that further changes to the law are required to support the position of kinship carers (for example, in relation to assessment and payments)?

- Yes
- No

If you've answered yes, please tell us below about any **specific** proposals you think ought to be made.

Barnardo's Scotland recognises that the issue of payment for kinship carers can be complex, especially where they are in receipt of state benefits. Barnardo's suggests that there should be a nationally agreed rate for kinship care allowances. Fees should be more flexible and reliant on individual assessment, subject to guidance. Both of these issues should be considered further as part of the strategy and may need a national UK approach given the benefits issues.

*16. The consultation paper covers the following topics in terms of foster care:*

- *the assessment process to match a child or young person to a carer (see paragraphs 3.6-3.9)*
- *amendments to existing regulations (paragraphs 3.27 and [Annex A](#))*
- *proposals for further support measures (paragraphs 4.9-4.16)*

*On these issues, do you think that there are **specific** differences or additional points which should be considered for kinship carers? If so then please give details.*

Kinship carers are different in the sense that they are already part of the family network of the child or young person. As such, this has a greater part to play in the assessment of the suitability of the carers, while maintaining a minimum level of care and protection for the children and young people concerned. This can all be done through guidance and requires further consideration as part of the implementation of the strategy. It is likely that kinship carers will require the same range of support arrangements as foster carers although the issues of links to birth parents could be complex. Consideration may need to be given to support workers for both the kinship carers and the birth parents.

## **Section 6 (pages 26-27) - Private fostering arrangements**

*17. In relation to private fostering arrangements, do you think that there is a need for any additional action, by:*

(a) the Scottish Executive

- Yes  
 No

(b) Care Commission

- Yes  
 No

(c) local authorities?

- Yes  
 No

*If yes, please give further details on what you think this should be*

**Section 7 (pages 28-33) - Fostering services, including kinship care - planning for the next 20 years**

***Developing a wider role for foster carers and kinship carers***

*18. Do you think that foster and kinship carers should become more involved in prevention and early intervention work?*

Yes

No

*19. If you answered yes at Q18, do you think their role could include helping children/young people and their families remain together in the parental home?*

Yes

No

*20. Please tell us below about any **specific** examples of good practice you are aware of involving foster and kinship carers in prevention and early intervention.*

Foster carers can provide useful role modelling for families where they have difficulty parenting their child. This can be facilitated with managed contact as part of the care placement.

Foster carers can provide an essential element of a community care support package, providing respite in times of crisis.

We already have examples in Barnardo's Scotland where community supports for young children and young people include an element of foster care and kinship care

***The recruitment and assessment process***

*21. What approaches, other than a recruitment campaign, have you used to recruit and retain foster carers?*

Barnardo's Scotland view is that the single most important factor in retaining foster carers is the support and training that they receive. This requires support services to foster carers that are appropriately funded and this will require additional resources in future. Foster carers consistently report good quality support as a key factor. This assists in terms of recruitment, for example 40% of our foster carers are recruited by word of mouth.

Barnardo's Scotland pays a retainer fee to foster carers to maximise retention, for instance in some cases, up to £100 per week for up to 6 months. We have found this to be a useful strategy. It is also helpful to recognise and reward existing carers through incentive payments when they introduce new applicants who become approved carers.

Barnardo's Scotland uses its shops for high visibility for foster recruitment and recognition of foster carers. For instance Barnardo's Scotland recently celebrated long service foster carers through a reception held at Scottish Parliament.

22. *Has your organisation run a fostering recruitment campaign?*

Yes

No

*[If you answered no at Q22, please go to Q25. If you answered yes at Q22, please continue with Q23.]*

23. *Following such a campaign, have you met your targets in attracting and sustaining applications?*

Yes

No

Barnardo's has had variable success in terms of local campaigns for foster carers

24. *Would a national campaign be of benefit to your local campaign?*

Yes

No

*If yes, please provide details of the type of national campaign you'd wish for.*

A national campaign would set the scene for more local follow up recruitment drives. It should be high profile using all forms of media including TV advertising. The coordinating of national and local activity is vitally important and Barnardo's Scotland would strongly support consideration of such a national approach.

25. *What would be the benefits of a more regionalised approach to recruitment and retention, for example a number of local authorities combining on a geographical basis? How could this best be delivered?*

There is no need for 32 different local campaigns and Barnardo's Scotland is already aware of consortium arrangements for recruitment. This makes sense and could be

promoted through the planning for a national strategy. It would be useful to consider different approaches in rural as opposed to urban settings. It would also be more cost effective with the sharing of local advertising, and recruitment uptake.

26. *Do you have any further suggestions or any **specific** examples of good practice regarding recruitment and retention of foster carers? If so please provide.*

Barnardo's Scotland has used corporate interests of the organisation to promote the work of foster carers, for example through shops and political activity.

Barnardo's Scotland has used current carers in the recruitment of new carers at planning and delivery stages.

Barnardo's Scotland has provided incentives for carers to attend training events

### **Training, learning and development**

The National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy will cover training, learning and development for both foster carers and kinship carers.

27. *In your opinion, is there a need for mandatory training for:*

a) foster carers



Yes



No

*If yes, please give details of the topic areas to be covered*

There is already material on this published through The Fostering Network and this could be usefully adopted as standard.

b) kinship carers



Yes



No

*If yes, please give details of the topic areas to be covered*

The 'yes' is dependent on the payment of fees. The content similar to foster carers

28. Please tell us what kind of training and development opportunities would be most welcome in your opinion (tick as many boxes as appropriate):

	<i>for foster carers</i>		<i>for kinship carers</i>	
	<b>mandatory</b>	<b>optional</b>	<b>mandatory</b>	<b>optional</b>
Easier access to a Scottish Vocational Qualification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Training for the pre-selection and selection process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	n/a	n/a
Following approval as a foster carer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	n/a	n/a
Child development issues and good practice in managing behaviour	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legislation awareness (including relevant regulations and standards)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Own local authority's plans for improving foster services in the local area	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

*Any other (please specify)*

29. What changes do you think need to be made to the provision of support services to foster and kinship carers by local authorities, independent and voluntary agencies?

Foster and kinship carers should have access to:

24 hour support

Opportunity to meet with other carers through support groups

Respite arrangements when and where required

Clarity on the financial payments available

***Fostering support services: children's services partnerships***

30. *In addition, we want to know more about the extent to which foster and kinship carers and children and young people are involved in the local planning and improvement process. Are you aware of/have you been involved in any such arrangements? If so, have they involved:*

- (a) children in foster care or kinship care
- (b) foster carers and/or kinship carers
- (c) relevant independent agencies.

Barnardo's Scotland has experience of children, young people participating in Children's Service plans in two local authority areas, Aberdeen and West Lothian.

***Inspection and regulation***

31. *Do you think that inspection and regulation arrangements of fostering services and kinship carers are proportionate?*

- Yes
- No

*Please give reasons for your answer*

It is early days regarding Care Commission inspection of fostering services although our experience is positive. The inspection of kinship care placements would be dependent on whether or not a fee was being paid.

32. *Do you think that the inspectorates and regulatory bodies currently provide adequate cover for the range of activities undertaken by fostering services and kinship carers?*

- Yes
- No

*Please give reasons for your answer*

'Yes' with regard to foster carers. Need further consideration with regard to kinship carers.

*If you wish to add any additional relevant issues, please do so below.*

We have indicated a number of times where we think additional resources are required. The issues of placement limits, registration and support to foster carers are where

Barnardo's Scotland believes additional resources will be most required and we think this requires careful consideration for the implementation of the strategy.