



# **Children's Safeguarding and Family Help**

## **Family, Friends and Fostering Service**

### **General information and eligibility**

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

## Fostering: general information

### 1 General information

Camden's Family, Friends and Fostering Service is the fostering agency for the London Borough of Camden and is responsible for carrying out statutory duties in relation to fostering.

- The fostering policies followed by the service are at: [Contents](#)
- Details of the services and guiding principles of the service can be found in the service Statement of Purpose. [fostering-statement-of-purpose-2021-22.pdf](#)
- Camden has a dedicated Recruitment Officer and a clear recruitment strategy that aims to ensure a diverse pool of foster carers offering a wide range of placements that meet the needs of looked after children in the borough. [marketing-plan-2021-22.pdf](#)
- The service ensures that there is forward planning to meet placements needs through the sufficiency strategy. [commissioning-and-sufficiency-statement-202.pdf](#)

### 2 Eligibility criteria

- In line with the Council's equalities and valuing diversity policy, Camden considers applicants wishing to be approved as foster carers irrespective of age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability, providing they can meet the needs of children who will be placed with them.
- However, in order to ensure that foster carers are able to meet the needs of the child, the following points must be taken into account when dealing with applications:
- **Age:** Applicants to become foster carers must be at least 25 years of age. Generally, there is no upper age restriction for applicants, but as age is linked to general levels of health, fitness and energy, this may need to be taken into account where applicants are over the age of 60, and an earlier medical report sought to decide on whether to continue with the application.
- **Marital status:** Applications should be considered regardless of the applicant's marital status, and cohabitees are welcome to apply. However, where there is an application from a couple to be joint foster carers, social

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workers should ensure that the relationship is stable, of at least 3 years duration and likely to be permanent.

- **Single applicants:** Camden will consider single applicants of either gender, and suitability to foster will be considered in the same way as for all applicants, with the emphasis being on their ability to meet the needs of fostered children.
- **Sexuality:** Applications should be considered regardless of the applicant's sexuality, whether they are single applicants or same sex couples.
- **Health requirements:** All applicants will undergo a full medical assessment. A specific medical condition will not necessarily be a bar to approval as a foster carer, but general health should be a key feature of the assessment and applicants should have a reasonable expectation of retaining good health in the future.

In cases where an applicant has a disability, the assessment should address how the disability will affect parenting and whether any support is required in order to care for a child.

- **Smoking:** Camden works to the BAAF practice note 51 and aims to reduce the risk of smoking to looked after children and foster carers. Assessing social workers should actively encourage any applicants who smoke to consider the risks to them and the children placed with them and take steps to stop smoking.

Applicants who smoke will not be considered to foster:

- children under 5
- children with certain health problems, for example asthma or other respiratory conditions
- children who come from non-smoking households
- older children who have asked not to be placed in smoking households.

When applicants give up smoking, there will be a period of 6 months before a child under 5 is placed with them.

Otherwise, applicants should undertake to follow the guidance from the National Safety Council on reducing children's exposure to smoke by:

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- not smoking around the child, or allowing anyone else to do so
- not allowing anyone to smoke anywhere in the house or car.
- **Applicants with children:** Applications from prospective foster carers with children of their own should be welcomed given their own experience of child-care, which will provide clear evidence of their parenting skills.

However, applicants should be encouraged to consider the impact of fostering on their own children. The age of the applicant's own children may affect the age range for which they can be approved to foster.

- **Accommodation requirements:** The applicant's accommodation must offer a safe environment and must provide enough space for everyone living there. Ideally, all children over the age of 3 should have their own room. However, Camden will allow siblings of the same sex and non-related children who are under the age of 8 to share a bedroom if all parties agree to this.

Decisions to allow children to share bedrooms will be based on a robust risk assessment and will not be authorised where there is a risk of bullying or a history of abuse.

- **Security of tenure:** Applicants must have secure tenure on their home, being either Council or Housing Association tenants or owner-occupiers.
- **Right of residence in the UK:** All applicants must have long-term right of residence in the UK, either because they are UK citizens, have right of abode or have indefinite leave to remain. It is also important that applicants intend to settle in the UK on a permanent basis (known as habitual residence).

Applicants will need to provide their passport in order to carry out DBS checks and where necessary, should provide any documentation to prove their right of residence.

- **Employment:** Applicants do not have to be in employment, as long as they are able to offer a child a secure home. However, it is important that employment does not interfere with caring responsibilities and this will be dependent on the child's age.
- **Pets:** Camden works to the BAAF practice note 42 on placing children with dog-owning families, and recognises that although dogs can present a risk to children, they can also provide benefits.

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For reasons of safety, applications cannot be considered from anyone who owns a dog that is proscribed under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which are:

- Pit bull terrier
- Japanese tosa
- Dogo Argentino
- Fila Brasileiro

Other breeds of dog kept by applicants may require assessment as part of the fostering assessment to establish the dog's experience of children and general disposition. The following breeds in particular may require careful consideration:

- Alsatian (German Shepherd)
- Rottweiler
- Doberman
- Bulldog
- Where there are more than 2 dogs ("a pack")

**Criminal records:** A person who is seeking approval as a foster carer will not be considered if they or any adult member of the household is disqualified from fostering has been cautioned for, or convicted of any offences listed in Part 1 schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations and the following:

- an offence against a child which involves violence or bodily injury (other than common assault or battery)
- cruelty (to a child under 16)
- indecency
- abduction
- the supply of Class A drugs
- importation/possession of indecent photographs of a child under 16
- any sexual offence against a child unless the offence was contrary to sections 6, 12 or 13 or the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the person concerned was under 20 when the offence was committed.

Other convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. In cases of doubt or dispute, the matter will be referred to the Care Provision service manager, who may also consult the Agency Decision Maker.

**Applicants from other boroughs:** Camden accepts applications from residents of nearby boroughs as long as the foster home is within 20 minutes travelling distance

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from the child's school or their home. We will consider applications from applicants living close to Camden's borders in Islington, Hackney and Brent.

**Applications from Camden councillors or employees:** Camden accepts applications from Camden councillors and employees but social workers must consider whether there is a potential conflict of interest. Please refer below to section 3 for further details of this.

**Transfers from other fostering providers:** Camden accept transfers from foster carers who have been approved by other fostering providers, but would still deal with the transfer as for any enquiry from a member of the public. The transferee would be expected to undergo the usual processes of initial enquiry, initial visit, statutory checks, preparation group, assessment, and approval by Camden's Fostering and Permanence Panel.

Social workers should liaise with the current fostering provider to ensure that the applicants have given notice and to obtain relevant information about them.

### 3 Conflict of interest

- Statutory guidance states that in considering an application to foster from an employee or councillor or a member of their household who works with or has contact with fostered children, the Family, Friends and Fostering Service must ensure care is taken to avoid any possible conflict of interest.
- For this reason, applications to foster cannot be considered from the following:
  - Employees of the Children and Learning Directorate
  - Councillors who are members of the Corporate Parenting Group or Children's Services Committee

### 4 Monitoring and quality assurance

The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service, the Resources service manager and the Family, Friends and Fostering service manager, in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Service, are responsible for managing the fostering resource in Camden and ensuring the quality of the service.

### 5 Whistleblowing

## Fostering: general information

- The Fostering Service adheres to Camden’s council-wide whistle-blowing policy: [lbcamden.sharepoint.com/sites/Essentials-Finance/SiteAssets/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FEssentials-Finance%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FWhistleblowing%2FWhistleblowing-Policy---June-2023%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FEssentials-Finance%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FWhistleblowing](https://lbcamden.sharepoint.com/sites/Essentials-Finance/SiteAssets/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FEssentials-Finance%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FWhistleblowing%2FWhistleblowing-Policy---June-2023%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FEssentials-Finance%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FWhistleblowing)
  
- All staff and foster carers have a legal duty to raise concerns where they feel individuals or the Fostering Service in general are failing to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Where it is not possible to raise concerns within the service, staff and carers may report concerns to the following;
  - Camden’s lead officers for child protection or safeguarding where there are issues regarding the welfare of a child.
  
  - Camden Council’s confidential and independent help-line for protected disclosure on **020 3117 2520** or the Ofsted whistle-blowing line on **0300 123 3155** where there are issues regarding the Fostering Service’s overall procedures around safeguarding.