

Provision of Fostering Agency Placements Flexible Agreement Blackburn, Blackpool, Cumbria and Lancashire

Q1. Why tiers, what are the advantages on being on tier 1 and why 5 households for tier 1?

The proposed tier structure and minimum requirements will allow for greater collaboration to support the objective of improved sufficiency across the BBCL subregion. The authorities have tried to make it as simple as possible for all IFAs either with carers within the boundaries or with carers close to the authorities to join the Flexible Agreement. However, by doing this the authorities also want to work with a smaller number of IFAs with at least 5 carers within our authorities. Please refer to the presentation slides regarding proposed tier 1 expectations but in addition to the call-off process, there will be a greater focus on; closer relationships, utilisation of reservation/retainers to prioritise local placements, stability and pipeline planning, shared learning and creative partnership approaches to meet unmet demand.

Q2. As a recently registered provider, we have had a positive Assurance visit from Ofsted (due to Covid) but not received a formal rating. What is the Flexible Agreement and tier eligibility in this instance?

To be confirmed and outlined in the tender documentation. However, it is intended that for IFAs without an Ofsted rating but meeting the other minimum requirements, it will likely be tier 3 until a published Ofsted rating is available. Once published, if the minimum requirements for tier 2 are met, and before a scheduled annual review, then an IFA may move up to tier 2 until the subsequent annual review takes place.

Q3. Will there be a requirement to do method statements?

There will be no requirement for IFAs to complete method statements unless they choose to apply to be considered for lot 1 tier 1 or to be part of lot 2 (enhanced care) or lot 3 (step down). If the minimum requirements for tier 1 are met (all lots), it is intended an IFA will be required, at their choice, to submit responses to quality questions. This will likely include a method statement.

It is proposed, as a minimum requirement, a method statement will need to be submitted by all IFAs wanting to be considered for lots 2 and 3.

Q4. Is the CPI increase guaranteed or will it be discretionary? Can the LA refuse to give an uplift?

It is proposed the annual average CPI increase will be available upon application. It will be the decision of the IFA to apply for an increase, up to the maximum amounts available. Providers will be entitled to the amount they apply for.

Q5. Social Value needs an evaluating model which recognises that foster care delivers social value by the nature of what it does. Please let this be the main consideration when you evaluate this.

Social Value will be evaluated as part of the scored quality questions for the tier 1 assessments only. It will be aligned to the LA's social value policy and consideration will be given to the inherent social value provided by foster care and the aim for increased foster care sufficiency within the authorities' area.

Q6. If each LA is responsible for its own contract management, will IFAs be required to send monitoring reports back for each individual LA?

To be confirmed and outlined in the tender documentation. Monitoring requirements will be streamlined wherever possible but will focus on individual KPIs, recruitment targets etc. (see slides). As children in placement will be the responsibility of the placing LA there may be specific individual LA requirements.

Q7. Will it be clear in tender documents how tiers will be used?

There will be tier guidance as part of the published tender documentation.

Q8. Will existing placements transfer onto the new flexible agreement and can uplifts be applied on existing placements?

Existing placements will continue under the existing contractual arrangements.

Q9. Will local or national Ofsted ratings be used and if a provider has 2 Ofsted branches, 1 with Good rating, 1 newly registered; would the provider be able to apply with both branches?

We propose the local Ofsted rating will be used.

If the local branch is new and without a rating an alternative branch, for example the next closest, could be referenced/used until the Ofsted rating is published for the new local branch. This is to be confirmed and will be outlined in the tender documentation

Q10. Have you sought feedback from other frameworks around the country with regards to tiering and the success or otherwise of this?

A number of agencies and local authorities have been approached for feedback on existing frameworks. The development of the model has been influenced by this feedback. Lancashire County Council has also utilised a tiering system for the last 8 years.

Q11. How will the Flexible Agreement fit with the existing North West FPS?

The BBCL Flexible Agreement will be the primary route for making placements for each of the named LAs. If a placement cannot be found under the BBCL Flexible Agreement the search will be widened in line with existing practice. The call-off process will be outlined in the tender documentation.

Q12. At what date are Ofsted ratings taken?

This will be outlined in the tender documentation. It is likely to be taken at tender submission, but the LA will check the Ofsted minimum requirements are still met at point of award/contract start.

Q13. How many providers are expected on Tier 1?

It is proposed approximately 12 IFAs will be on tier 1, lot 1 (mainstream lot). For lots 2 and 3 (enhanced care and step down) it is intended there will be a smaller number of IFAs on tier 1, approximately 5 on each.

Q14. How often can providers apply for different lots - would this be at the annual reviews or at the re-opening?

It is intended that tier positions for all lots will be reviewed on an annual basis, for existing IFAs on a lot. The Flexible Agreement will be opened every 3 years so if not already on lot 2 or 3, existing IFAs will be invited to apply to be accepted on to the lots.

Q15. When will a new provider be able to join the flexible agreement?

It is intended that the Flexible Agreement will be opened every 3 years to allow new providers to join. However, the LA reserves the right to open the Flexible Agreement earlier if demand or need requires.

Q16. What percentage of placements would tier 1 and 2 providers be expected to cover? i.e. what percentage would still be provided by Tier 3?

It is likely tiers 1 and 2 (for lot 1) will provide the majority of placements. However, there is not a specific percentage. There is the expectation that most of the placements will be made with IFAs on the Flexible Agreement. A clear call-off process will be applied to all placement searches. As a key aim of the agreement is to increase sufficiency within the area, the authorities hope the number of placements placed within tiers 1 will increase during the agreement term.

Q17. Would other LAs be able to join BBCL?

The Flexible Agreement will exclusively be for those LAs named in the published tender documentation.

Q18. Is there a commitment from DCS and leaders in working with IFAs in partnership?

BBCL are committed to continuing to work with IFAs. As outlined in the presentation, BBCL's objective is for greater collaboration to support improved sufficiency across the subregion.

Q19. Will the discounts be optional rather than compulsory?

We intend for the long-term discounts to be a condition of the Flexible Agreement, although we are planning on reducing the maximum level of discount required.

Specific fees for siblings (instead of a sibling percentage discount) are intended to be requested as part of the tender. The level of the prices submitted will be at the discretion of the IFA.

Long-term discounts are not being planned for lots 2 or 3

Q20. At what date will the number of FC households in BBCL be assessed? At the submission date or evaluation date?

The number of fostering households will likely be assessed at point of submission.

Q21. Regarding Parent and Child placements - rather than a blanket fee, will there be the option to submit differing fees based on 2 parent requests, age of parent etc.

To be outlined in the tender documentation. It is proposed a single fee will be applied for this placement type.

Q22. To clarify, if a provider, for example, doesn't have 2 fostering households in BBCL by Dec-21 but has 5 Form Fs in progress, will access to the framework be closed for 3 years?

We are proposing the geographical minimum requirements to be accepted on to the Flexible Agreement are broader than the BBCL footprint (see slides). For example, this wider footprint would allow for an IFA to be accepted onto the Flexible Agreement as tier 3 and then incorporated into subsequent annual reviews, and potential tier moves, as the number of BBCL households increase.