

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

Following the market engagement event, all Independent Foster Agencies (IFAs) were asked to complete an online survey. 11 individual surveys were completed. This document has been produced in response to this feedback with additional questions and comments, with Local Authority (LA) responses, outlined below.

1. IFAs appeared to agree that the geographical areas were the right areas, with no IFAs disagreeing with them.
2. IFAs stated the approach to minimize the workload for IFAs was reasonable. No IFA thought the approach was not reasonable.
3. There was a mixed response in terms of the aim to work closer with a smaller number of IFAs as part of the Tier 1 proposals.

Question / Comment. Some feedback received highlighted a concern that working closer with a smaller number of providers (tier 1, lot 1 (mainstream)) could limit sufficiency, innovation and disadvantage smaller providers.

Comment: A key aim for the Blackpool, Blackburn with Darwen, Cumbria and Lancashire (BBCL) model is for greater collaboration with all contracted IFAs so that together we can improve sufficiency and support innovation. It is proposed that provider forums will be inclusive for all IFAs and individual monitoring meetings will still take place with all agencies. This will support building collaborative relationships to improve sufficiency across BBCL. Communication and sharing good practice and market intelligence will apply to all IFAs on the Flexible Agreement. The LAs expectations relating to these key principles will be more defined and therefore higher for those in tier 1 (see presentation).

The minimum requirements for tier 1 will help identify IFAs with carers within the footprint, provide a quality / price evaluation, and support a clear call-off process. The minimum levels of 5 fostering household within the identified footprint still allows for smaller IFAs to be eligible for tier 1, lot 1. The cohorts for lots 2 (enhance care) and 3 (step down) will require a greater level of engagement in terms of individual child discussions, continuous IFA review and creative approaches to placement planning. Taking learning from current practices, a closer working relationship with a smaller number of IFAs in tier 1 (lot 2 and 3) can be more conducive in finding suitable placements for these children. The minimum number of fostering households for lots 2 and 3 are proposed to be lower to reflect the placement type. There will also be opportunities for IFAs to be considered and move into tier 1 during the term of the Flexible Agreement.

4. All IFAs agreed with the aim to reduce the number and scope of discounts.
5. All IFAs agreed with the suggestion to introduce reservation fees of up to 28 days to allow for an Authority to identify a child for the carers.

Question / Comment. There were comments that the use of reservation fees needs to be carefully managed through clear guidance and ongoing dialogue between agency and LA.

Comment: Guidance will be part of the tender documentation. It is proposed that reservation and retainer fees will be applied to support underserved areas as well as more complex searches. In collaboration with IFAs, this will better utilise highly experienced carers and improve sufficiency in particular localities, allowing time limited local carer retention. This approach will be in conjunction with the call-off processes and would not replace normal placement planning.

6. Several comments regarding how to identify carers who could be suitable for Enhanced Care (lot 2). The majority focussed on the importance of ongoing valued communication between the IFA, whose role would be to identify the carer, and the Authority.

Question / Comment. There was a comment stating that Children requiring therapeutic support wouldn't be covered within the Enhanced Care lot (lot 2). Also, that LAs need to ensure placements can move from mainstream (lot 1) to Enhanced swiftly, where appropriate.

Comment: It is proposed the model for lot 2, enhanced care, will not be prescriptive. It is the intention that IFAs can submit their preferred model against the Service Specification. The aim is to improve the communication between IFAs and the Authorities. If, as part of this ongoing communication and if agreed by the LA and IFA, a placement could move to an enhanced level of care and upon review may move back to mainstream. There will also be the option of including Additional Services to all placements, where appropriate, as the aim is to ensure the needs of the child are met and the placement is fully supported.

7. There was universal agreement on the use of retainer fees where a child could not move in immediately. There was some comment over how long a delay to the placement start would be necessary to trigger a retainer.
8. The majority of IFAs agreed that the retainer fee and the reservation fee should be the same.
9. 10 out of the 11 IFAs recognised the three cohorts identified as part of the review of recent placements as needing Enhanced Care. The same number stated that these cohorts would benefit from Enhanced Care.
10. When asked what other cohorts that there may be, **Question/ Comment requested: Inclusion of specialist Step Down placements for sexual abuse, emotional health and wellbeing and harmful sexual behaviours.**

Comment: It is proposed the model for lot 3, step down, will not be prescriptive. It is the intention that IFAs can submit their preferred model against the Service Specification. This could include support for children with specific behaviours, experiences, or risks. There will also be the option of including Additional Services to all placements, where appropriate.

11. Only one IFA disagreed with the aim to request one method statement regarding Lot 2 Enhanced Care.

12. In the summary of the cohorts, we identified that the ages of the Children reviewed were between 8-15 years old. **Question / Comment received stated: 8-15 years old has been referenced for the Enhanced lot, can you confirm the Enhanced lot will not be limited to age?**

Comment: The age range referred to relates to the research findings only. Enhanced placements made under lot 2 will not be limited by age. It is proposed to request a price that covers all child, irrespective of age.

13. No IFA disagreed with the proposal for additional services to be agreed on a case-by-case basis for those children whose needs were not met by the Service model offered as part of the enhanced lot.

14. IFAs would like to know what the time delay will be between tiers.

Comment: IFAs will be required to respond to placement search requests within the timeframe identified in the referral information. The timeframe will depend on the child's placement requirements. The tiering system will be systematic to allow those IFAs in a higher tier to have earlier sight of a search, but this will not cause unnecessary delay in finding suitable placement options for a child. For example, emergency notifications (same day) may require a response from a higher tiered IFA within 1 hour, or sooner, of receiving the referral before the LA widens the search.

15. One comment made that existing placements should be brought onto the new agreement, on the new terms and conditions including prices.

Comment: Existing placements have been made under a variety of different terms and conditions over a number of years. The existing terms and conditions were known at the point of tender. The new Flexible Agreement will be for new placements only, not existing ones. This is standard practice across the country.