

All Directors of Children's Services
England

The Fostering Network
87 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8HA

3 February 2021

Dear Directors of Children's Services,

Responding to the concerns of foster carers regarding contact arrangements, school attendance and priority access to the Covid-19 vaccines.

The Fostering Network is extremely grateful to all those involved in fostering who have shown resilience and determination to continue to provide support and stability to children and young people in foster care throughout the unprecedented circumstances of the past year.

I am aware that many of you are managing under increasing pressures; however, as a membership organisation, we feel we need to write to you to highlight the concerns being expressed by both our foster carer and fostering service members largely arising from the expectations placed around face-to-face contact and school attendance, exposing foster families to multiple households. Through our helplines we are hearing of many cases where the impact of these decisions is resulting in placement instability for children and a reduction of capacity as some carers are feeling like they cannot continue to foster, becoming too ill to foster, or being threatened by the service that the child will be moved if they do not comply.

Due to the risks foster carers are being asked to take, many feel they should be eligible for priority access to the Covid-19 vaccination as part of the social care workforce. While we are delighted that increasing numbers of foster carers are being vaccinated every day as some local authorities are proactively including them within priority lists, currently, there is a post code lottery regarding the inclusion of all foster carers.

We would like to work in partnership with you to address these concerns and have identified two ways in which we might do so.

1. Meaningfully including foster carers in decision making for the children in their care

Whilst many local authorities undertake and implement robust risk assessments around contact and school attendance during the pandemic, some foster carers are reporting that their circumstances and vulnerabilities with regard to Covid-19 are not being fully considered within the decision-making processes.



We would ask that you review the approach your staff are taking to these issues to ensure that risks around contact arrangements, school attendance and other face-to-face meetings are considered on a case-by-case basis to best meet each child's needs. We have produced resources on [our website](#) to assist social workers and foster carers when agreeing placement and contact plans during the pandemic.

2. Including foster carers in priority group two for the vaccine as part of the social care workforce

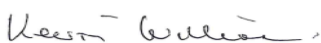
We support local decision making regarding the inclusion of foster carers as part of the social care workforce such that they are eligible for priority access to the vaccine. We particularly voice support of the circumstances where all foster carers, independent of who they are approved by or where they live in relation to the local authority they foster for, are included within the priority lists to be drawn up by local authorities.

The Fostering Network's campaigning on this issue has resulted in over 1,700 letters being sent to MPs and we continue to push for a national directive for all foster carers to be included in priority group two.

We remain committed as an organisation to support all efforts to address these concerns but would ask that you support our efforts by taking the following positive actions:

- Ensure the use of the exemptions to the current coronavirus restrictions within your authority, especially around contact and school attendance for children in foster care, are based on thorough risk assessments on a case-by-case basis taking account of the foster carer's circumstances.
- Recognise and include foster carers (including independent agency carers) within your social care workforce to grant them access to the vaccine in priority group two.

Yours faithfully,



Kevin Williams
Chief Executive, The Fostering Network

CC: The Fostering Network's fostering services membership