



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
<b>DATE:</b>	Thursday, 10 October 2024

<b>PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:</b>	Children, Young People and Education
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>KEY DECISION:</b>	Y

**SUBJECT: Mockingbird Family Model**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the Mockingbird Model for fostering that delivers sustainable foster care. Mockingbird is an evidence-based model that supports fostering households to nurture the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community, similarly to that of an extended family. The Mockingbird Model significantly aids in placement stability, foster carer retention, placement sufficiency and foster care recruitment. The report provides information on the implementation of the Mockingbird Model in Blackburn with Darwen and how the model will be sustained following the end of the Department for Education (DfE) funding in March 2025.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- a) Agree to establish a single constellation of the Mockingbird Model with effect from October 2024;
- b) Agree to make budget provision of £80k in the financial year 2025/26 funded by way of a contribution from the Invest to Save Reserve;
- c) Agree that, subject to the success of the first constellation, the continuing costs of the Mockingbird Model is funded by way of a virement from the Placements Budget (so that the overall costs is neutral for the Council);
- d) Give delegated authority to the Strategic Director Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Executive Members for Children, Young People and Education to implement up to 4 additional constellations subject to the costs being met from consequent savings in the Placements Budget;

- e) Agree that a further report on the operation of the Mockingbird Model be submitted to the Executive Board in 18 months.

### 3.BACKGROUND

Foster carer recruitment and retention has become a significant challenge across the UK with local authorities competing with independent fostering agencies (IFA) to recruit carers. The number of people wishing to become foster carers has significantly reduced. This, with the competitive nature of fostering recruitment, has led to a decline in the number of foster carers approved in local authorities across the UK.

As part of the Stable Homes, Built on Love Social Work Reform, the Department for Education (DfE) has recognised the increasing challenges that local authorities face and has provided local authorities with the means to implement the Mockingbird Family Model as part of the plans to recruit and retain foster carers nationally, with the aim of increasing placement sufficiency. The Mockingbird Model is a global award winning and pioneering programme led by The Fostering Network in the UK that delivers sustainable foster care. It is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. The funding provided by the DfE is provided to implement constellation 1 and up to a further 4 constellations in Blackburn with Darwen. Each constellation will include a hub foster carer, 6-8 satellite fostering households and a Liaison Worker who will be a qualified social worker.



The satellite carers can consist of mainstream carers, kinship carers, staying put carers and parent and child carers. The Fostering Network provide overwhelming statistics on the success of the Mockingbird Model in relation to foster carer support and retention as well as having a positive impact on placement stability, reducing the number of placements moves for our children and young people. Which in turn reduces the need for costly independent agency placements both fostering and residential. Having Mockingbird embedded in the service will be used in recruitment activity, increasing the number of in house foster carers.

The Annual Report from the Fostering Network for the Mockingbird Family Model 2021-2022 evidence,

# Stability during a turbulent year

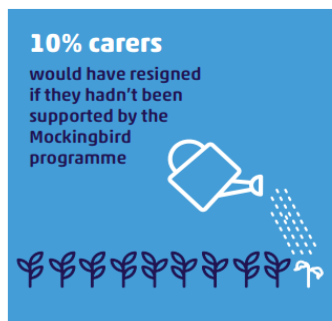
One of the central aims of Mockingbird is to provide proactive support and intervention that will mitigate the risk of a placement going into crisis or breaking down. Key data is captured to allow an understanding of how formal and informal interventions and activities contribute to the stabilisation of a placements that may have otherwise resulted in a placement breakdown.

This year monitoring data shows an increase in the number of satellite families remaining in Mockingbird compared to previous years with 88% satellite homes remaining part of Mockingbird in 2020-21 compared with 74% in 2019-20.

There was also a reported reduction in the percentage of satellite homes that ceased to foster during 2020-21 dropping to 2.4% compared to 5% in 2019-20.

Looking at overall outcomes from Mockingbird data submitted between May 2018 – March 2021. Of the 1334 satellite carers participating in the programme between May 2018 and March 2021, services reported 134 would have resigned without the support provided by the Mockingbird programme.

Of the 1609 children and young people in placements participating in the programme between May 2018 and March 2021, services reported 299 placement breakdowns have been avoided.



# A Sustainable System

These infographics show cumulative estimated costs avoided using data collected 2018 – 2021. The programme has grown each year and some satellite carers and children, and young people will have joined or left in a particular year, or continued participating through multiple years.



## Placement Stability

Cost of Placement disruptions in Blackburn with Darwen (BWD) between August 2023-August 2024.

- There have been seven placement disruptions with in-house foster carers that led to IFA placements being sought due to no capacity with our in house foster carers at a cost of £6,680.14 per week x 52.14 = £348,302.50 per year which is an average of £49,758 per child per year.
- There has been one kinship fostering placement that disrupted that led to an IFA fostering placement being used at a cost of £944.27 per week x 52.14 =£49,234 per year
- There have been 3 kinship fostering placements where the children moved to commissioned residential placements at a cost of £11,465.33 per week x 52.14 =£597,802.30 which is an average of £199,267 per child per year.

- There have been 8 fostering placements that disrupted where the children moved to commissioned residential placements at a cost of £42,810.19 per week x 52.14 = £2,232,123 which is an average of £279,015 per child per year.

The Mockingbird Model is aimed at reducing placement disruptions and increasing placement stability. Not only does this provide more stability for our children and young people, but this will also create savings in relation to the cost of placement moves highlighted above as fostering households will begin to become involved in the constellations that will increase year on year.

### **Foster Carer Recruitment**

The Mockingbird Model is already being used as a recruitment tool in all BWD recruitment activity as well as in the Northwest Foster with Us Recruitment Hub, recruitment activity. The Mockingbird Model is highlighted in all social media posts aimed at demonstrating the support provided through the model to potential applicants who are seeking to be foster carers. The most recent social media recruitment post highlighting the implementation of Mockingbird at BWD, showed a dramatic increase in interest compared to other social media posts, demonstrating how Mockingbird can be a powerful and valuable tool for foster carer recruitment. At BWD we have recruited five fostering households with five currently in assessment, with a projection of approving 10 fostering households by November 2024. Our aim is to recruit twelve fostering households by March 2025.

### **Implementation of the Mockingbird Model**

The local authorities in our northwest cluster are implementing the Mockingbird Model with the aim of launching their first constellation by November 2024. At BWD we are the lead local authority in implementing the Mockingbird Model across the cluster of local authorities. We have begun to implement the first Mockingbird Constellation. The Hub Carer has been identified, the Hub carer will receive a fostering allowance equivalent to 2 x Band 3, 16 plus. The Hub Carer has one available placement at this cost, which is included in the foster carer payments budget, therefore the additional cost will be 1 x Band 3, 16 plus weekly allowance. This is included in the DfE funding until March 2025.

The Liaison Worker role has been recruited to and has been seconded from the Kinship Care Service. This is included in the funding from the DfE until March 2025.

We are currently undertaking Meet and Greets with foster carers to identify satellite carers with the aim of launching the first constellation in October 2024. Part of the role of the Hub Carer is to arrange monthly activities with the satellite carers and the children in placement. These activities can include days out, meals or other activities such as bowling, cinema etc. The Hub Carer will also provide planned and emergency sleepovers for the children and young people placed in the satellite carer households. These are integral to the success of the model in building meaningful relationships that offer support to all the carers involved in the constellation.

The Liaison Worker is tasked with building effective relationships with other professionals, agencies, and partners to ensure that robust support around the constellation is maintained, along with ensuring that recording and data analysis is provided. This role will oversee the constellation, supervise, and support the Hub Carer as well as supervise and support other foster carers through a protected caseload.

## **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

Should the Mockingbird Model not be sustained within BWD, there is a reputational risk as the other local authorities within our northwest cluster are all implementing the Mockingbird Model, there is the expectation that we at BWD as the lead authority, will need to lead the implementation of the model.

Without the support of the Mockingbird Model, we risk further placement instability and placement moves which impacts on our children and young people, as well as increased cost to the commissioning budget.

We know that using the Mockingbird Model in our recruitment has seen an increase in interest and activity, should the model not be sustained we risk losing potential fostering households to other local authorities that have implemented the model.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There is a need to consider and update and revise current policies relating to fostering at BWD to ensure that the Mockingbird Model is implemented within all existing fostering policies.

There will need to have a policy that is developed and specific to the Mockingbird Model that includes the key roles and requirements within the model, specific training and support, underpinning principles and fidelity requirements.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is a need to consider options for the Mockingbird Model to be sustainable for BWD following March 2025 when the funding from the DfE will cease. The Mockingbird Model is recognised as being self-sustaining once constellations are established, as placement stability will increase and the need for emergency moves including moves to commissioned fostering placements and residential placements will decrease.

For the Mockingbird Model to reach this point, additional funding through an invest to save approach will be needed from April 2025. The foster carer payments for the monthly activities have been projected as £200 per month, this will be managed through the foster carer payments budget.

The role of the Liaison Worker will be an additional social worker role within the fostering service. The supervision of this role will be provided by one of the team managers across the fostering service. It has been considered as to whether this role can be absorbed within the fostering mainstream supervision and support fostering team however, the social workers on this team are all at capacity with caseloads supervising existing foster carers and do not have capacity to undertake this role.

- An additional social worker post for the role of Liaison worker. Band H, including on-costs is £53,209.
- Fostering Network licence costs are provided through the DfE until the implementation of up to 5 constellations ending in 2026. Following this there will be an additional cost of £8,800 per year.
- Fostering Allowance at 1 x Band 3, 16 plus, this would equate to £23,217 per year

The total estimated budget pressure for 2025 is £76,426. It is proposed to fund this additional cost from the Invest to Save Reserve to provide an opportunity for the constellation to become established and embedded.

The estimated ongoing pressure is £85,226. Subject to the success of the implementation of constellation 1, it is proposed to fund this from within existing budgets as once it is established and embedded, there should be a reduction in the use of costly commissioned placements.

The table below summarises the anticipated costs of constellation 1 and how it will be funded:-

Year 1 2024/25	Year 2 2025/26	Year 3 2026/27
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Expenditure	493,988	76,426	85,226
	(493,988		
Income	)	-	-
Funding from Reserves		(76,426)	
Funding from Existing Budgets			(85,226)
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

With the model established, there will be an increase in the recruitment of fostering households and a decrease in fostering disruptions, meaning that there will likely be less need of IFA fostering placements and commissioned residential placements.

## 9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1  Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2  In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3  In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

Strategic Director of Children's and Education.  
Strategic Director of Finance and Resources.

## 11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

## 12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

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<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Louise Helm</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	