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# **Hillingdon Council**

## **Children and Young People's Service**

### **Fostering Statement of Purpose**



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## Introduction

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service believes that most children are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing an integral role in their upbringing. However, where this is not possible Hillingdon Council are committed to providing alternative high quality care to looked after children within a family environment.

The service is part of the Children and Young People's Service, which is an integral part of the Children, Adults and Housing Directorate. The service is delivered through three teams: the Recruitment and Assessment team of foster care applicants; the Support, Supervision and Development of Hillingdon's registered foster carers; and the Kinship team working with family and friends and connected carers.

**All services operate within the legislative requirements of:**

- the Children Act 1989 & 2004
- services England Regulations 2011 & 2013
- services Regulations 2002 & Minimum Standards
- the Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying National Minimum Standards for Services
- the Human Rights Act 1998
- the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

**A copy of the Statement of Purpose will be made available upon request to:**

- any person working for the purposes of the service
- any foster carer or prospective foster carer of the service
- any child/young person placed with a foster carer by Hillingdon Council
- the parent of any such child/young person
- any placing authority of any child placed in Hillingdon foster care

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service must ensure that at all times the service is conducted in a manner which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose. This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed, updated and modified whenever necessary, but not less than annually. Within 28 days of any amendment the Service Statement of Purpose must be sent to the Chief Inspector of OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) and published on the provider's website.

## The statement of values

The service supports and contributes to ensuring all looked after children receive effective care which enables them to fulfil their potential by making them feel safe and valued. Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service intends to help maximise children's health and educational opportunities through the assessment, support and review of carers, who provide a wide range of alternative placements for children in care.

Hillingdon upholds the right of every child to grow up in a loving and stable environment, which will normally be within their birth or extended family. Therefore, we aim to keep families together and reunite children with their families at the earliest appropriate opportunity. When this is not possible, Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service will find a placement for a child that allows them to grow in confidence and independence.

The primary aim of Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service is to provide the highest quality of substitute family care for looked after children. It will seek to do this by working in collaboration with all departments within the local authority and through our Emergency Duty team.

## Aims and objectives

- to provide the best possible foster placements for children and young people to enable them to reach their full potential
- to recruit, assess, train and support all prospective and approved foster carers, including kinship carers, so they can provide a wide range of local placements, which meet the diverse needs of children and young people in a safe and nurturing environment
- to support and advise all those affected by the fostering process
- to actively promote fostering and family and friends care as the framework to secure alternative placements for children, unless there is clear evidence to suggest that this is not appropriate
- to ensure there are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the Service thereby ensuring quality services
- to ensure that cost effective services are provided and commissioned which maximise efficient use of resources and provide sufficient placements
- to provide wherever possible local placements, to promote continuity and maintain family networks
- to ensure that prospective foster carers from all the backgrounds have equality of access to the service and are welcomed without prejudice, regardless of ethnic origin, faith, age, sexual orientation, gender, disability, background, marital or employment status and considered on their individual merits
- to ensure that the recruitment process is timely, respectful and fair and delays are avoided
- to ensure monitoring systems are in place so that data can be gathered and used to inform service planning, strategy and procedures
- to adhere to the principles of data protection and freedom of information and to continue the sound practice in managing confidential information

- to ensure detailed placement plans are completed, including arrangements for delegated authority
- to raise the profile of the Hillingdon Council's Service through a robust recruitment campaign, accessible information and advice
- to ensure the effective matching of the child to the carer's skills and experience to enable the full range of the child's needs to be met
- to minimise the number of placements experienced by individual children and ensuring that placement stability procedures are followed
- for children to move on from foster care in a planned and positive way and with regards to those leaving care, contribute towards a smooth, transitional service for young people moving into adulthood
- to consider with foster carers staying put arrangements for children and young people

## Services provided

### Recruitment of foster carers

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention strategy which is supported by an annual operational plan. This is based upon the needs of looked after children and current data regarding placements, placement shortfall and future need. An annual target is set to recruit a minimum number of foster carers per year to meet the demand, especially placements for larger sibling groups, minority ethnic children, adolescents and parent and child placements.

Enquiries to become a foster carer are welcomed from people in Hillingdon and the surrounding area, in accordance with our sufficiency strategy, regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, and culture or employment status. Applicants who are not already connected to the child must be 25 or over to be considered suitable to apply. It is a minimum requirement that all foster carers have a spare bedroom, unless they are only offering a placement to a baby 0-2 years.

### Information sessions

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service holds a monthly recruitment information session with the support of approved foster carers and young people with care experience. This recruitment technique is supported by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) as research has shown that by having networks of approved foster carers and young people more potential recruits are likely to be attracted to the service.

### Enquiries

The duty worker of the service responds to enquiries from the public about fostering, aiming to provide a same day response. A booklet on fostering is sent to all enquirers for further information. Enquirers will be able to have an initial discussion with the duty worker and it can be established if the applicant is able to potentially meet the current requirements of the service. Basic information will be required at this stage. A questionnaire will be completed by the duty social worker over the phone. If the application is deemed suitable an initial home visit will be arranged.

## Assessment and approval of foster carers

### Initial visit

An initial home visit is an opportunity for foster care applicants to find out more details about fostering for Hillingdon council and the assessment process. It is an assessment undertaken by the service to evaluate initial suitability to foster. Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service has a commitment to aim to visit all suitable enquirers within 7 working days of their first enquiry. Following the information obtained during the visit, the social worker will verbally advise the applicants about the decision to formally accept their interest in moving into stage one of the approval process, so that the necessary information can be gathered as soon as possible. All decisions are endorsed by the recruitment and assessment fostering manager.

### Application

If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family and that the basic criteria have been met, applicants are invited to submit an application. This will give the service written consent to undertake necessary checks and collect the information required in stage one.

### Stage one

This includes undertaking all the necessary statutory, DBS, medical checks and obtaining references and interviewing these people about the applicant's suitability.

### Statutory checks

National Minimum Standards 2011 and Services Regulations 2011 and the services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 require the services to undertake statutory checks in stage one.

These are:

- a Disclosure and Barring Check (DBS) on all people in the household who are over 18 and anyone who will be supporting the foster carers, such as relatives and babysitters
- local authority, employer and other agency checks (e.g. NSPCC, Probation Service)
- child health and education checks will be carried out on any school-age children in the household
- three personal referees (one of whom can be a family member) are requested who will provide written references for the applicants as part of the assessment process. These people will be interviewed by the assessing social worker
- interviews will be carried out on previous partners when there have been children from the partnership and other significant relationships

### Skills to foster training (STF)

Preparation training will be offered in stage one. The services offers a preparation training course, Skills to Foster (STF), providing there are a sufficient number of people to make up a viable group. In the event that the course cannot run for this reason, applicants will be offered a place on the next course or are invited when possible to attend a STF course at another local borough via our consortia arrangements. All applicants must attend the STF training course. If an application to foster is made by a couple, both are required to attend the training.

The course usually takes place over three days and is facilitated by two staff members with the support of approved foster carers and young people with care experience. Those facilitating the course will provide written feedback on each applicant's participation in relation to the content

of each session and this material will be used to hold a feedback interview with each applicant at the end of the training to discuss the suitability of them moving to stage two.

There will be an evaluation sheet available the end of each session and through seeking user feedback the service will continually aim to improve the training offered.

## **Stage two - foster carer assessment**

Once the information that is required in stage one has been collected, and providing that this is satisfactory and meets the requirements of Hillingdon Council's Service Fostering Regulations, applicants will be invited to apply to move onto stage two. If for any reason this is not possible because of information gathered in stage one, the service will advise the applicants verbally and in writing within 10 days of receiving this information. To prevent delay in some instances, the service may decide to move to stage two before all the checks in stage one are completed.

The full assessment process is carried out in order to determine the applicant's suitability to meet the needs of any child/children likely to be placed with them. The assessment is guided using the BAAF Form F which is completed through undertaking a series of face to face discussions in the applicant's home. Applicants are encouraged to undertake self-assessment during the process and are given regular feedback throughout the process. The assessment is carried out in line with National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011 and Services Regulations 2011 and the services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.

The framework and timetable for undertaking the assessment will be drawn up as a written agreement between the assessing social worker and the applicants at the start of the assessment, with a panel date set at five months from the date of receiving the application form. NMS guidance allows a period of eight months for completion of an assessment to be presented at the panel. However, the service aims to complete this with five months.

The assessment is quality assured by the fostering team manager to ensure that it meets the necessary requirements. Once the assessment is completed, the applicants will have an opportunity to read the assessment report, sign it and then the report is presented to the Hillingdon Fostering and Adoption Panel with a recommendation of approval.

### **Approval stage**

The Fostering and Adoption Panel is independent of Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service and is made up of a variety of professionals and independent members. Applicants are invited to the Fostering and Adoption Panel hearing their application, and although attendance is not compulsory, applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. The panel will make their recommendation to the agency decision maker whether to approve, defer for further information or not approve the application to foster. The applicant will be advised of the recommendation verbally on the day of the panel. Unsuccessful applicants are informed of their right to make representations to the agency or apply for an Independent Review Mechanism Panel hearing within 28 days. Prior to approval, a supervising social worker will be allocated to the foster carer to support and supervise the carer in the fostering task.

## **Fostering and adoption panel**

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service operates a central list with suitably appointed individuals who are called upon to sit on panel ensuring that each panel meeting is quorate and can hear both fostering and adoption cases.

Panel members and the Agency's Decision Maker (ADM) are supplied with copies of the reports to panel in the week preceding the panel. The service ensures the effective administration and functioning of the panel, including the recruitment and annual appraisal of panel members.

**The panel is additionally supported by:**

- the panel adviser
- a legal adviser (Legal Services)
- a minute taker

**The panel generally meets twice a month and more frequently where increased business dictates to consider the following:**

- approval of new foster care applicants
- the annual review of foster carers, in their first year and then every three years thereafter or if there is a change of circumstances or approval terms and when there has been a serious allegation or complaint
- consideration of an adoption plan for relinquished babies
- adoption matches of Hillingdon Council's looked after children with an adoption care plan and placement order
- approval of a child's long term fostering care plan
- the match of a child to foster carers for a long term/permanent placement

## **Supervision and support for foster carers**

The service recognises that supervision, support and development opportunities for foster carers are vital to support foster carers in their work. It is important that foster carers' work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the needs of looked after children in Hillingdon. Once an approval decision has been made by the agency decision maker, the foster carer will receive written details about their approval and registration. They will meet with their supervising social worker (SSW) and be given a welcome pack including two copies of the Foster Care Agreement to read and sign, retaining one copy for themselves.

All carers (including family and friends carers) have an allocated SSW, who visits foster carers regularly in accordance with National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations. The SSW also telephones the carer weekly whilst a child is in placement. All visits and support will be tailored to meet the needs of the carer and the child in placement and there will be an increase in support and supervision if requested, or deemed necessary by the carers or the SSW. When children are not in placement the SSW will continue to visit at intervals of not more than every six weeks unless it has been agreed by the fostering team manager that visits can be less frequent, for example when there is a fixed and agreed break from fostering. In these circumstances an updated assessment will need to be completed and signed off by the fostering manager before any further placements are made with the carers.

As part of the monitoring of the work of foster carers, there will be two unannounced visits per year by the SSW to the foster carers' home. If at any time the service believe it is necessary to increase the number of unannounced visits it has the power to do this and will advise the foster carers first about this increase.

A duty social worker is available daily to offer support and advice to all foster carers if their allocated SSW is away from the office and is not contactable. There is an out of hour's telephone line available in the evenings, weekends and bank holidays to support carers; this is run by Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service.

The emergency social work duty team is also available to all foster carers outside of usual office hours, at weekends and bank holidays.

**The service provides practical support to carers and young people that includes:**

- practical advice on parenting, safe caring and behaviour management techniques from SSW's, experienced foster carers, therapists or case workers as most appropriate
- written care plans, delegated authority and placement plans outlining any particular identified need or behaviour management support to be provided
- monthly support groups
- training and coaching on particular health issues as required or highlighted
- medical advice regarding any medication needs as required
- practical support workers or services as identified in care plans to support placements provided by carers
- written guidance in the form of policies and procedures covering possible eventualities and actions required and key contact points (Foster Carer Handbook)

The looked after nurse will offer support and advice to foster carers on health issues.

**Independent support for foster carers**

Foster carers are eligible for individual membership of the Fostering Network. The Fostering Network provides foster carers with a comprehensive range of specialised support services that benefit the whole of the fostering household. This allows them access to advice and support, including legal advice independently of the service. Hillingdon Council's Service will automatically on approval, pay for the foster carer's annual subscription. Further details of the benefits of joining the Fostering Network can be found at [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/) phone - 020 7620 6400

**Foster carer's handbook**

All foster carers are provided with the Foster Carers Handbook which provides comprehensive information on all aspects of fostering, including information on allowances, training and procedures. When information is updated, foster carers will be sent updated information to insert as a replacement in the handbook.

**Children's guide to fostering**

The service has a children's guide to fostering which provides information about fostering. The child's social worker is responsible for giving this to the child and spending time with the child to talk through and explain its content in accordance with the child's age and understanding. The SSW will take a proactive role to ensure this is done.

**Foster carer training/continuous professional development (CPD)**

The provision of post approval training is central to maintaining high standards of care by ensuring the personal and professional development of foster carers. Each foster carer will have a personal development plan (PDP) completed and reviewed annually to assess and identify their learning and development needs.

The foster carer's training plan has a comprehensive menu of training courses and it is now expected that the SSW attend some of the CPD to support the learning and follow this through in their support work with carers. Carers are required to attend a minimum of four training sessions, or the equivalent each year to support them in providing the highest possible quality care.

### **The training, support and development (TSD) standards**

As part of their induction, all foster carers are expected to complete the TSD standards by producing a workbook in their first year following approval as foster carers and within 18 months for family and friends foster carers. The SSW is responsible for assisting the carers in undertaking this work and ensuring that it is completed within the specified timeframe.

### **Foster carer reviews**

Foster carer reviews are held annually from the date of their original approval. The SSW is responsible for preparing a full set of paperwork with written contributions from stakeholders for each child who has been placed with the foster carer during the review period.

All stakeholders of a placement are invited and are expected to provide a written contribution for the foster carer review. This forms the essential evidence base to evaluate the care offered to looked after children in the foster home, to provide the necessary safeguarding for looked after children and quality assurance of these resources.

All foster carers are required to have DBS and other statutory checks and medical reports updated every three years and if applicable, have an education check on a carer's school aged child.

The review papers are quality assured by the fostering team manager. The complete set of paperwork is sent to the foster carers and the reviewing officer (RO) at least 5 working days before the review meeting is held.

The RO chairs the review meeting and prepares a separate report of the meeting with recommendations which are returned to the fostering manager to ensure that these are followed through. Any disagreements about recommendations made by the RO are passed to the service manager for consideration. For couples who foster it is the expectation that both parties will be present at the review meeting.

The majority of reviews take place in the carer's home. The RO does not have any casework responsibilities for Hillingdon Council and therefore offers a degree of independence; this is the sole remit of their role. Reviews provide an opportunity to positively evaluate progress and practice over the previous year.

All initial foster carer reviews are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration of continued approval and from the start of 2017 the practice of returning cases on a three yearly basis will be introduced .

Concerns regarding a foster carer's progress or change in circumstances can lead to a review being called at any time.

The voice of the child is essential in the quality assurance of foster carer homes and a review meeting will not be conducted unless the voice of the child is apparent, either through their own written submission or through their social worker. Good practice states that both will be apparent.

### **Foster carer's allowances**

The service is responsible for ensuring that foster carers are paid the appropriate allowances and have produced the financial policy for Hillingdon Council's foster carers. Allowances are reviewed annually in accordance with NMS and foster carers are advised /consulted if changes are proposed.

## **Kinship care**

The temporary approval of a relative, friend or other connected person and the immediate placement of a child with a connected person under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations 2010 is a joint responsibility of the child's social worker, kinship duty social worker, respective team managers and the social work operational service manager, who will establish if there is a suitable person who is connected to the child who can provide care if a child becomes looked after. When such arrangements have been made, the service will undertake a Regulation 24 temporary approval assessment within 5 days to establish if it is suitable to continue with this arrangement. The recommendation to continue with the arrangement and approve the applicant as a temporary foster carer will be presented to Hillingdon Council's Access to Resources Panel (HARP) for a decision. For planned placements the arrangements will be made before the child is placed.

The service makes arrangements to undertake statutory checks, payment and to begin the full foster carer assessment or a special guardianship assessment and provide a supervising social worker. Kinship carers in these situations are assessed, supervised and supported in the same way as non-connected foster carers.

## **Placements for children**

Placements for children are considered on the basis of first seeking carers from within the child's own network of family and friends (connected person's carers). If this is not possible a placement from within the borough's own fostering resources will be sought unless this is not in a child's interests. If a suitable placement is still not found, then an external resource will be located by the placements team.

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service receives requests for foster care placements from social workers after senior managers have approved the child coming into local authority care. The request is provided in writing on a service request form (SRF) and outlines the reasons for placement, the expected outcome, care needs, ethnicity, religion and language and intended timescales, legal status and any other key information that enables a suitable match to be found.

All children will be placed with carers able to meet their needs and will be provided with a bedroom of their own unless they are siblings who have previously shared a room when a risk assessment will be completed and this is suitable to their needs, or it is a baby under two years of age who can sleep in a cot in the same room as the carers.

If certain circumstances, when it is in the child's best interest to place them with a carer outside of the carer's approval category and the carers are in agreement with this, a variation or exemption, depending on the requirement, will be requested and can be agreed by a senior manager in the service and presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel if required.

The service will place increased emphasis on ensuring all children's placement plans and matching details are recorded systematically and consistently. All forms will be signed and copied to the relevant staff, parents and carers. Copies will be maintained on the foster carer's file as well as the child's or young person's file.

## **Delegated authority (DA)**

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2010 and 2013 set out the principles of delegated authority in foster care placements.

A placement planning meeting is held within five days of a placement being made and delegated authority will be discussed and managed according to Hillingdon's DA policy.

Children's social workers are responsible for completing this form in partnership with the foster carer, their SSW, the child according to their age and understanding, birth parents and any other relevant stakeholders in the placement.

The SSW will ensure that this written information is given to the foster carer along with the placement information record and a copy of the child's care plan.

## **Education**

The service believes that education and training are key elements to all children living successful adult lives. The service will aim to keep children within their existing school provision with the aid of transport if required. If this is not possible, the service and social workers will endeavour to find suitable alternatives working closely with Hillingdon education service and virtual head.

A suitable alternative is considered to be another full time school placement or placement as outlined in any health and social care plan that may be in existence. The 'Education of Looked After Children' policy outlines in detail the requirements, roles and responsibilities of staff, carers and parents.

Hillingdon has appointed a virtual head teacher to oversee the educational needs of all looked after children and young people placed within and outside of the borough. Hillingdon will also provide support, training and advice to foster carers. Schools will provide all children with a personal education plan (PEP) and foster carers are active in promoting the child's PEP. Carers will be supported to provide extracurricular activities aimed at encouraging educational attainment.

## **Therapy and mental health provision**

The service has access to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) who will provide services to young people with particular mental health needs. In addition, a dedicated looked after children CAMHS service, the Multi Agency Psychological Service (MAPS) provides psychological services for children and their carers who do not meet the criteria to receive a tier two CAMHS service. Referrals for this service can be made through the child's social workers in consultation with the team around the looked after child. MAPS also provide regular consultation and training to staff and foster carers.

## **Storage, access and security of foster carers records**

Hillingdon Council's Fostering Service recognises the importance of case records and will do all in its power to ensure records are kept secure at all times. The services adheres to the services (England) Regulations 2011 and the local authority's requirements for the storage of files and information relating to foster carers.

Foster carer files are stored electronically on the secure protocol database. Paper files which were used before this system was implemented are archived with a specialist company in a secure storage facility. Only the service can access and request these files to be removed from the archive.

In accordance with the Services (England) Regulations 2011 any record relating to a foster parent in the register maintained under regulation 31, must be retained for at least 10 years from the date on which their approval is terminated. The records compiled under regulation 30(5) must be retained for at least 3 years from the refusal or withdrawal, as the case may be, of the application to become a foster carer. Closed files will be archived off site but can be retrieved within 24 hours.

## **Allegations, complaints, disruptions and outcomes**

### **Allegations**

All children are entitled to the same level and standard of protection from harm, including those receiving services from statutory or other agencies. For this reason, enquiries and investigations relating to children in receipt of such services must be dealt with under the London Child Protection Procedures, Child Protection s47 enquiries Procedure.

Allegations or suspicions that a foster carer has caused harm to a child will be investigated thoroughly, speedily and sensitively under those procedures and will involve open and honest communication with and support to all those affected.

It is important to note that, although there may be insufficient evidence to support a Police prosecution, this does not mean that action cannot be taken to protect a child nor that the termination of a foster carer's approval cannot be considered.

It should also be noted that it may be necessary to consider during an investigation what action, if any, should be taken with regard to other children with whom foster carers against whom allegations are made have contact, including their own children.

All allegations are referred to the local authority designated officer (LADO) located in the Safeguarding Service and in these instances when threshold for referral is met, OFSTED are notified about the allegation/incident.

Following an allegation or complaint against foster carers, the case is presented to the Fostering and Adoption panel to ensure scrutiny and for recommendations as to the carer's suitability to continue providing care. In all cases, the needs of the children remain paramount. All carers will have access to the Fostering Network advice line for support and will also receive support from their supervising social worker. An independent worker can be appointed to support carers through the process of investigation if required. Details of any allowance paid in these circumstances can be found in the financial policy.

### **Complaints**

All foster carers are given a copy of the "Comments, Complaints, Compliments" leaflet.

#### **Complaints regarding the service can be made to:**

The Children's Social Care Complaints Department,  
London Borough of Hillingdon,  
Civic Centre, High Road, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW  
or email: [social\\_services\\_complaints@Hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:social_services_complaints@Hillingdon.gov.uk)

## The Structure and staffing of the service

The service is part of the Children, Adults and Young People's Directorate.

Hillingdon is committed to monitoring the quality of its services and the outcomes of placements.

The skills, knowledge and experience of the service staff are the cornerstone to providing a safe and effective service to children and young people.

The service employs a mixture of qualified and non qualified staff. The social workers and managers have relevant qualifications, are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and have a current enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks. They are appointed by interview in accordance with the Fostering Regulations and standards, equal opportunities, good practice and the boroughs human resources recruitment policies.

Copies of staff qualifications, registration, references and checks are kept on personnel files. Regular supervision, training and annual personal development and performance appraisals are conducted.

The Head of Service for Children Resources is Vanessa Strang, the Deputy Director for Children, Adults and Young People is Ana Popovici and the Corporate Director is Tony Zaman.

## Registration and inspection

OFSTED is responsible for having an overview of the service. They undertake regular inspections of the service and during the inspection seek confidential feedback from service users, carers, and placing Social Workers.

OFSTED are alerted to any significant incidents in the service such as child protection investigations or major allegations against carers.

**The service is registered with and inspected by Ofsted. Enquiries should be addressed to:**

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate, Store Street,

Manchester M1 2WD

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 1231 (about children services)

Tel: 0300 123 4666 (complaints about agencies)

Tel: 0161 618 8524 (minicom / textphone enquiries)