

**Annual report of  
Fostering Service  
April 2020 – March 2021**



## **Outline**

1. Context of the Fostering Service
2. Progress against key priorities
3. Priorities for 2022/23

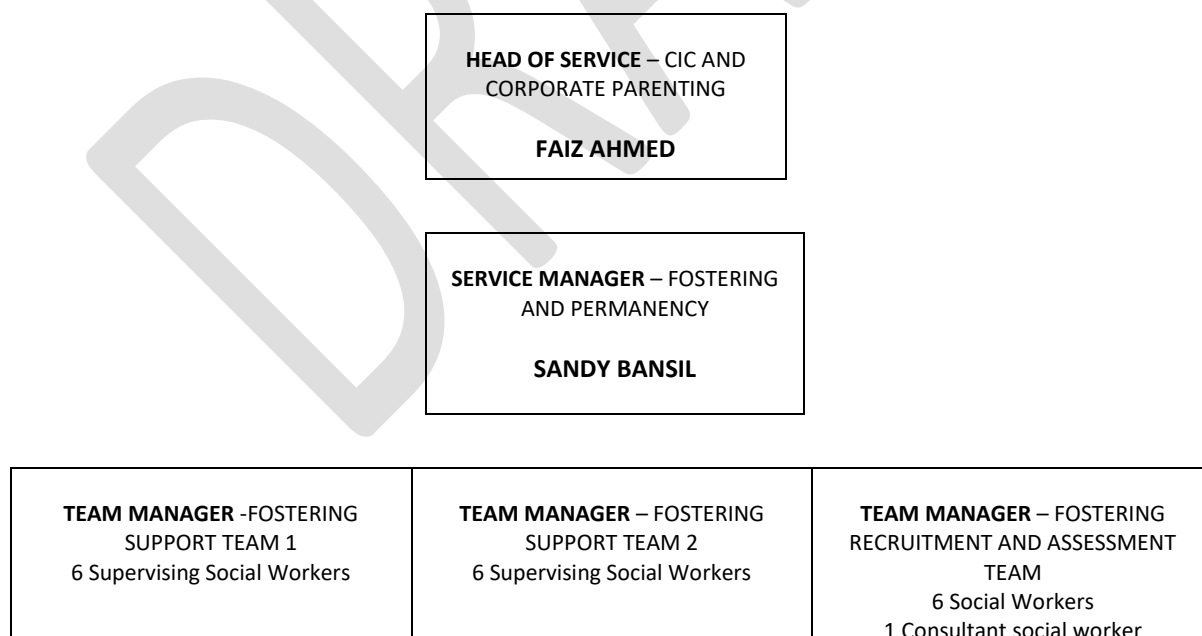
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## 1. Context of the Fostering Service

A key priority for Haringey Council is to ensure that children can be brought up safely and happily with their birth parents or within their wider extended family network. Where it is identified that children cannot remain within their family and that they need foster care, the fostering service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people who are looked after in Haringey.

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection by Ofsted as part of the ILACS inspection framework. Haringey Council’s Fostering Service provides a range of short term and permanent foster carers who have a diverse range of skills and experience. Foster carers provide family-based services ranging from weekend respite/short breaks to supporting birth parents and carers, preparing a child for adoption, or providing a permanent home for a child through to independence. There continues to be a high number of family members and friends who come forward for assessments, while legal proceedings are underway, requesting to care for a child.

Haringey’s fostering Service comprises of 3 teams in total. There are 2 teams that provide the day to support to our in house foster carers, each comprising of a Team Manager and 6 Supervising Social Workers. In addition to the Fostering Support Teams, we have a team dedicated to Foster Carer Recruitment, Special Guardianship assessment and post order support. The teams’ structure is illustrated in Table below and is managed by the Head of Service for Children in Care, Fostering and Permanence.



The Recruitment and Assessment Team has recently been re-aligned to ensure that there are specified workers carrying out foster carers assessments (Form F assessments) and Special Guardianship Assessments. This team comprised of a Team Manager, 4 Social Workers completing Form F assessments, and 1 consultant social worker managing 2 social workers undertaking Special Guardianship Assessments who are also dedicated to post order support for Special Guardians.

In 2021, the service experienced a change in management with the start of 2 newly appointed Team Managers, 1 for the Fostering Support Team and 1 for the Recruitment and Assessment Team. There has also been a new Service Manager appointed. All managers are permanent members of the service.

## 2. Key Looked After Children data

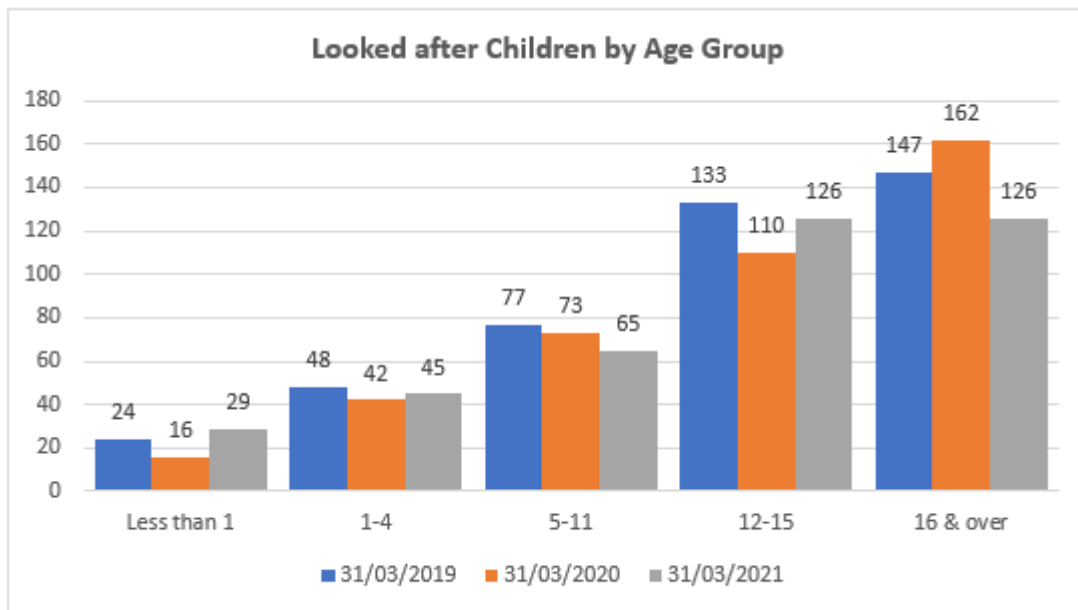
By end of March 2021, there were a total of 391 looked after children in Haringey. The chart below shows Haringey’s position in terms of looked after children’s numbers in comparison with our statistical neighbours and the England average over the past three year period. Compared to other London boroughs, Haringey sits somewhere in the middle in terms of numbers. Although the number of looked after children is slightly lower compared to past two years (2019 and 2020), the complexity of needs has increased as is evident in the following charts.

**Looked After Children Numbers**

	2019	2020	2021
Hammersmith	246	256	246
Waltham For	285	304	317
Islington	313	365	342
Lambeth	349	361	371
Enfield	374	372	377
<b>Haringey</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>391</b>
Greenwich	479	461	418
Hackney	405	431	431
Southwark	460	458	449
Lewisham	484	472	471
Croydon	818	791	683
Statistical N	421	427	411
<b>Inner Lond</b>	<b>4220</b>	<b>4280</b>	<b>4120</b>
<b>England</b>	<b>78140</b>	<b>80000</b>	<b>80850</b>

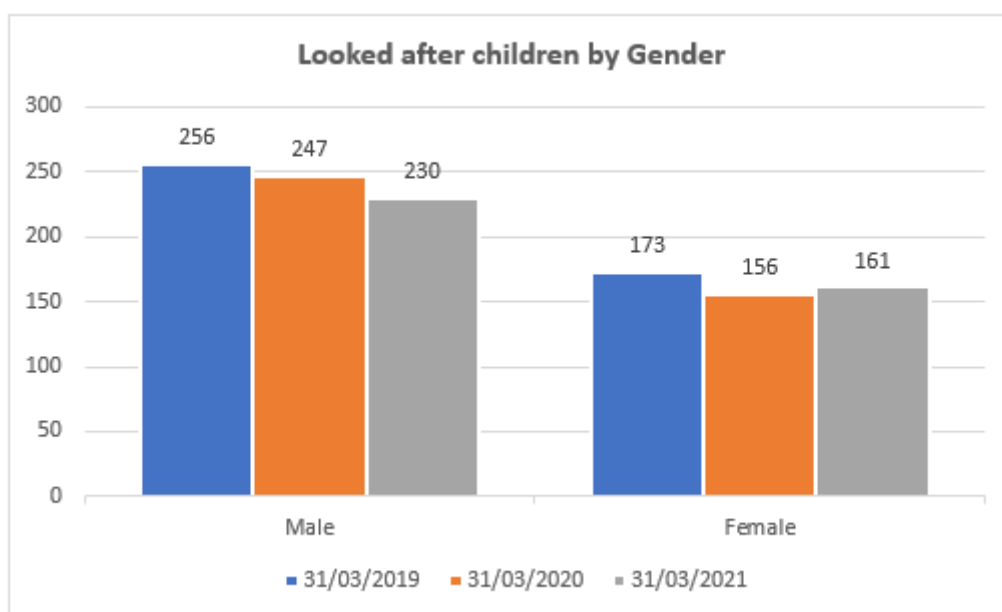
### Age group of looked after children

The data shows that there is a gradual shift in the age group of children coming into local authority care. The number of older children – 12 and upwards – needing local authority care continues to grow. In 2021 they made up 64% of the looked after children in Haringey. Many of the children have complex emotional and mental health needs, suffered trauma and are vulnerable to exploitation and extra familial harm, which meant identifying suitable placement for them was a challenge.



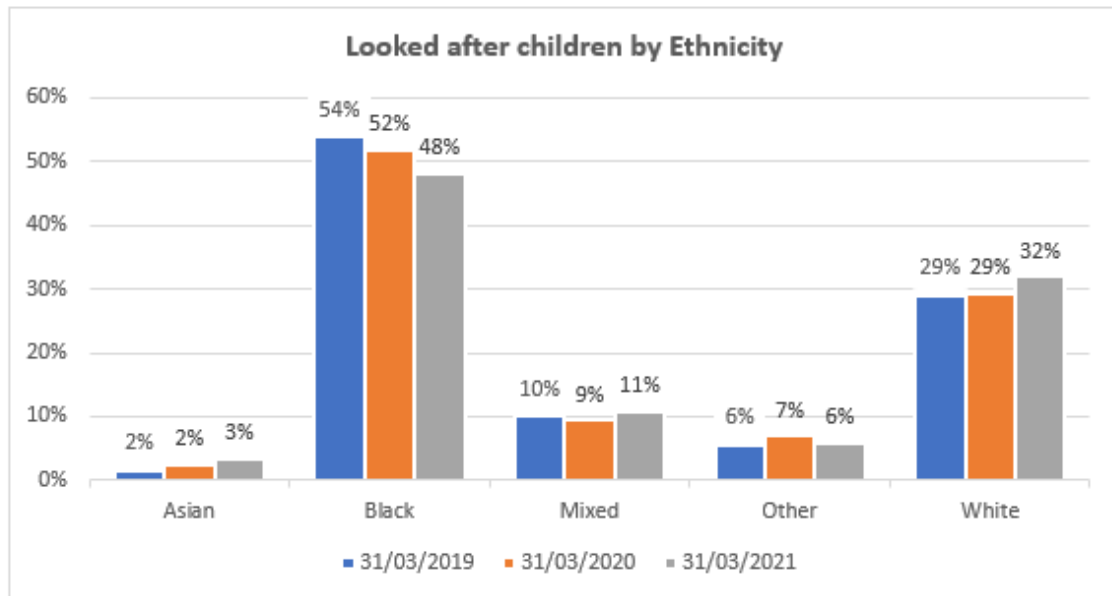
### Looked After Children by Gender

While historically there were more male looked after children than female, in 2021 the gap has narrowed as evident in the chart below, with 59% male and 41% female.



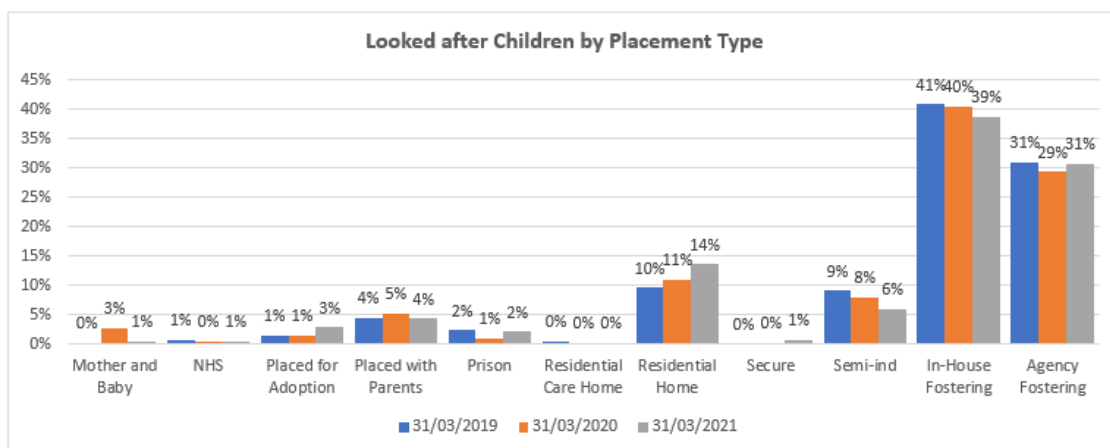
## Ethnicity of the looked after children

The data shows that children from black and minority ethnic communities are overrepresented in the looked after children population, which indicates their vulnerability.



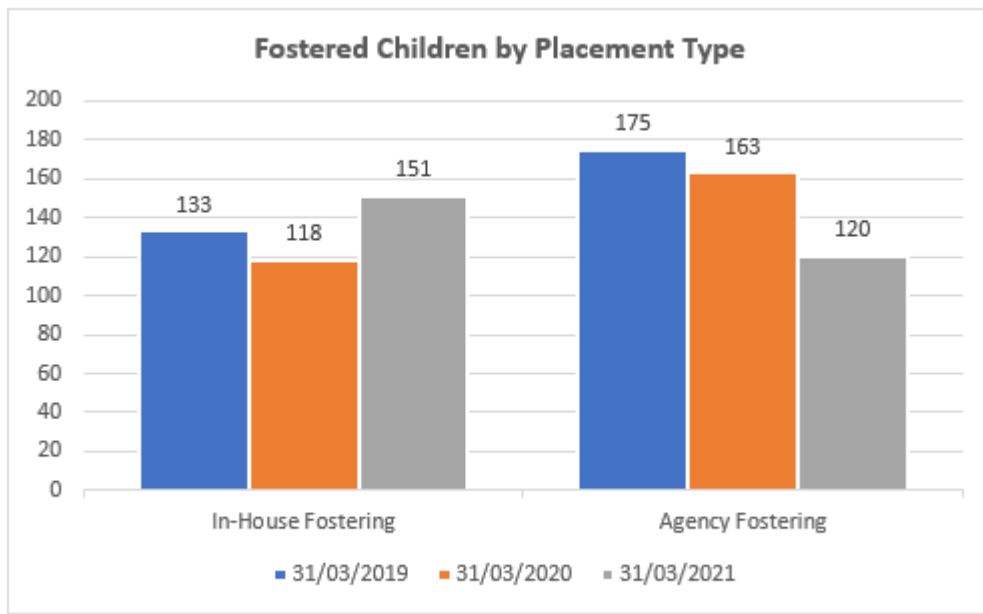
## Placement type

Last three years' data consistently shows that the majority of looked after children were placed with our in-house foster carers. In 2021, this was 39% when compared with all placement options.



## Fostered children by placement type

When only fostered children are taken into consideration, in 2021, 56% children were placed with in-house foster carers as opposed to 44% with agency carers. This highlights the needs to expand the pool of in-house carers to cater for the complex needs of looked after children. The number of agency placements has reduced each year thus reducing our dependence on agency foster carers.



## Care Leavers

The local authority's duties towards looked after children do not end when they turn 18. Care leavers can be supported by the service up to the age of 25 depending on their circumstances. Some looked after children continue to live with their foster carers after they turn 18 under a staying put arrangement. This gives them continuous stability and allows them to become confident and independent adults. In 2021, there were 233 care leavers. Out of them, in the age group of 19-21 year old care leavers 5.3% were staying put. In the age group of 17-18 year olds it was 18.6%.

### 3. Fostering Data

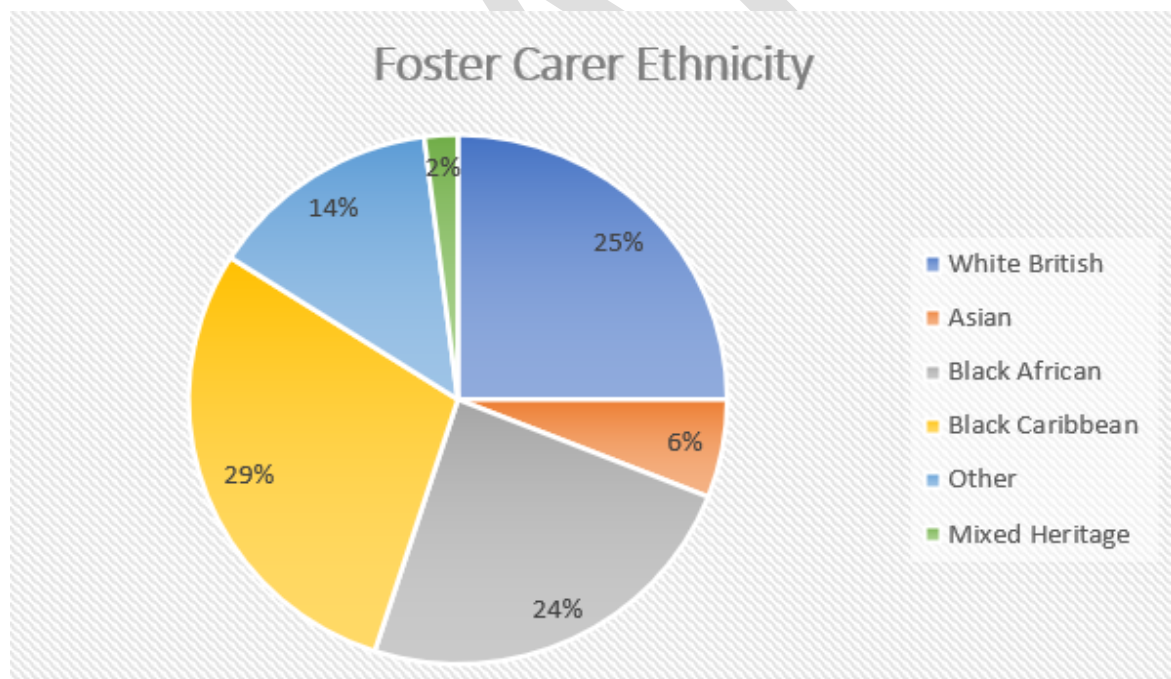
At the close of March 2021, there were 142 foster carers. The average caseload for supervising social workers was 14 cases.

A breakdown of our in-house carers shows:

- 113 Foster Carers
- 26 Friends & Family Carers (connected carers)
- 2 Short breaks placement for looked after children
- 1 Parent & Child Carer.

#### Ethnicity of foster carers

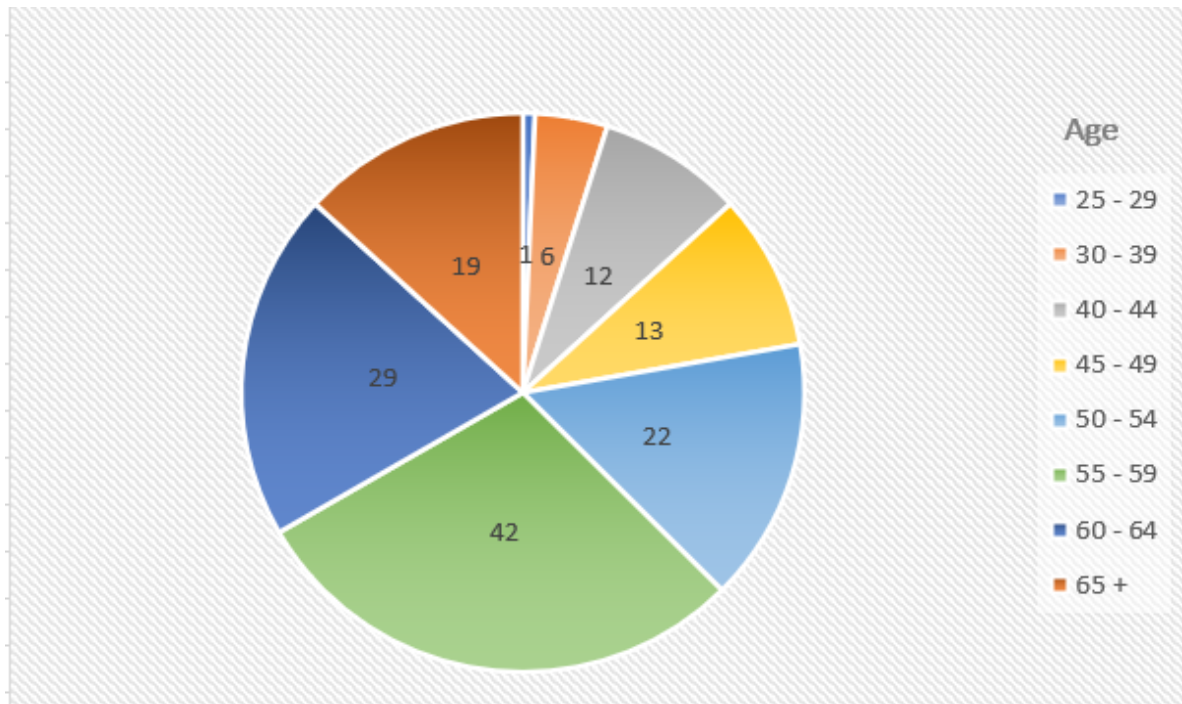
59% of our carers are from either Black African or Black Caribbean heritage. However, this does not mean a guaranteed placement match for children from the similar background. There is a need for more carers from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds to meet the needs of children from an increasingly diverse population.





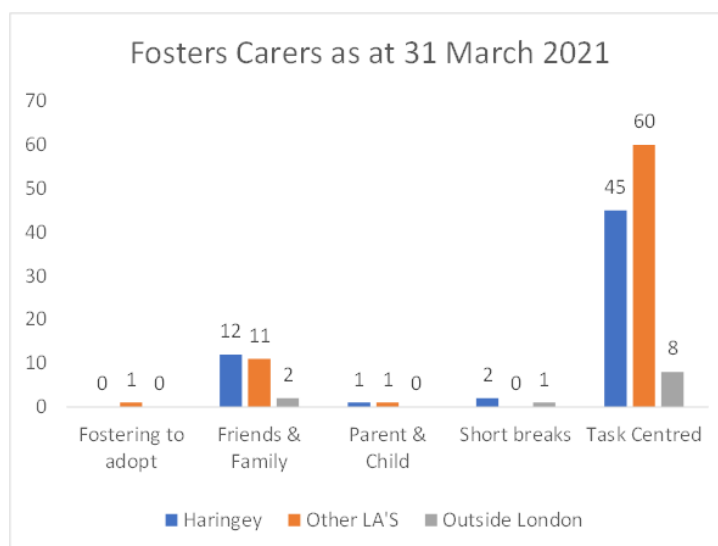
## 2.1 Service challenges

- a) Haringey also has a high number of foster carers who could potentially choose to retire or reduce their commitment to Haringey as a result of their age. Haringey's statistics on age are shown below.



- b) There are 48 Foster carers between the ages 60 – 65. The age group of this cohort of foster carers equates to a third of all available foster carers for Haringey. This does present Haringey with the benefit of having a mature and experienced field of foster carers and has informed the recruitment and retention strategy to mitigate a potential 33.3% loss of these experienced foster carers. The recruitment of Foster Carers from April 2021 to date indicates that the strategy is working with 5 new carers having been approved, with a further 13 ongoing assessments with an even distribution of age and experience that matches the needs of children in care and likely to come into care. However, between 2020 to March 2021, Haringey had increased their Foster Carer capacity by 5 through newly approved carers.

- b) Haringey’s fostering services also have a higher volume of foster carers that live out of borough. However, majority of them live in neighbouring borough and a total of 11 carers live outside of London.



## 4. Update on Key Priorities from previous year

There were a number of key priorities set out in the last annual report which have been a focus within the service throughout 2020/21.

**3.1 Recruitment and Retention** – As detailed above, 2020/21 has seen an increase of 5 newly approved foster carers. However, Covid has had an impact on the follow up of initial enquiries, and timely completion of assessments which was significant.

In 2020/21 the average timescale for completion of assessments was 422 days. This again has been partly due to the impact of Covid which, following the first lockdown in March 2020, led to a brief halt with the progression of assessments. There was also the added impact of capacity within the Recruitment and Assessment team leading to Supervising Social Workers being allocated foster carers assessments (Form F Assessment) as well as holding their own caseloads.

Areas that need further development in the service and are a work in progress are around the retention of foster carers. We have been working on the development of a substantial training

package for our carers and are also in the process of reviewing the Haringey Fostering allowances to be more in line with our neighbouring local authorities.

The service also has a number of projects that increase the fostering offer to support foster carer recruitment such as the foster carers room extension project and Mockingbird.

**3.4 Covid Support** - Foster carers continued to receive a good level of support from their supervising social workers and, despite the pandemic, have continued to have access to regular support groups. During the pandemic, activities and opportunities have been affected with many planned events being cancelled or postponed.

Supervising Social Workers have continued to provide virtual support groups in smaller groups which our foster carers have continued to attend. Moving forward, the support groups have developed a hybrid model of delivery by continuing with small virtual groups and larger face to face groups which can be used as a learning and development platform for our carers.

Visits moved to virtual visits during 2020/21, with the flexibility of a hybrid model where Supervising Social Workers had the ability to undertake face to face as well as virtual visits following careful risk assessment and use of PPE. Supervising Social Workers also provided regular check-ins with their carers.

Training continued to take place with all training offered within our Fostering Training Brochure moving to a virtual platform. Foster Carers have also been able to access various learning and development platforms through KCA (knowledge Change Action), which provide a number of online self-learning courses. We had 50 courses that were accessed on this platform over the course of 2020/21. In addition Foster Carers have also been provided with access to the Community Care Inform platform where they are able to access useful resources and articles to support them with their learning and development.

Work has continued to take place with the Haringey Foster Carer Association through regular attendance at the HFCA meetings where Foster Carers have had the opportunity to raise any issues for senior management follow up.

All of our Looked After Children were provided with laptops to support their home learning and support available to our Foster Carers through the Virtual School.

We have also commissioned family therapists to provide support to our foster carers. The family therapists provided sessions directly to foster families.

**3.5 Targeted recruitment for teenage carers and sibling groups** – as mentioned above, recruitment of new foster carers has been slow in 2020/21 with only 5 newly approved carers. The recruitment has included a range of foster carers, with 4 of them being able to offer placements for our teenage cohort of looked after children.

**3.6 Review capacity of current carers** – capacity has been reviewed within our existing cohort of carers and we have 6 carers that meet the criteria and have taken up the offer of the ‘Foster Carers Room Extension Project’. This initiative will provide 6 additional rooms within our existing foster carer cohort and increase capacity for 10 children. This will also provide opportunities for sibling groups of 2 to be placed together.

**3.7 Embedding of SOS** – Signs of Safety (SOS) is the practice model implemented by Haringey, which is a strengths-based model. Staff have completed the SOS training and are active in structuring meetings, visits etc. using the SOS format of what’s working well, what are we worried about and next steps. As a service we have been working on further developing the practice model by incorporating it into our day to day practice including meetings, supervision, safety planning, case mapping and group supervision. In addition, the Secure Base Model has also been introduced which will further enhance and reinforce the principles the SOS practice model.

**3.8 Reducing delays in completing assessments** – We have introduced a process better to track and monitor the progress of Special Guardianship Assessments being undertaken by the service through a well-defined process of allocation, midway review and support planning. We have introduced a new Permanency Tracking Panel which will incorporate tracking of all Regulation 24 placements which are signed off by the head of service.

**3.9 Continued focus on voice of the child** – The child is central to the work we do in the service and the development of the Secure Base Model training has further enhanced the practice around ensuring that we do not lose sight of our children.

Our Children in Care Council (ASPIRE) have also recently circulated a survey to our looked after children and care leavers. Our in-house carers have been actively supporting children to complete the survey so that their feedback can inform service delivery.

The Fostering Service work closely with LEAP who are a conflict management charity that works in a fun, creative and interactive way with young people. They are committed to working with young people to create positive change within organisations and systems. Historically LEAP have worked directly with our foster carers and continue to offer group work and individual sessions around conflict management to our foster carers as well as our supervising social workers.

We also have care experienced young people that sit on the Fostering Panel as panel members to inform and contribute towards decision making for foster carer approval and continued approval.

**3.10 Placement stability** – There has been renewed effort in ensuring placement stability through joined up working between the looked after children, social work team, fostering service, independent reviewing service, virtual school, CAMHS and other involved professionals. Placement Stability Meetings are used effectively to identify and address issues

promptly that could disrupt a placement. Cases with complex issues are brought to the Unstable Placement Panel, which is multidisciplinary forum chaired by the head of service, where cases are discussed forensically from a systemic perspective using a solution focused method.

The service also has access to 2 therapists who offer Family Therapy for our fostering households. This has been useful for children, young people and adults experiencing a wide range of difficulties such as:

- Family communication problems
- Child and Adolescent behaviour difficulties
- Fostering, adoption, kinship care and the needs of looked after children
- Attachment-based issues
- Loss and bereavement
- the effects of trauma.

Sessions provided to fostering families may include all members of the family or anyone from their support network. Sessions take place as a group and individually. This is an extremely valuable resource to the service which contributes to the stability of placements.

In addition to the above, the service launched the Mockingbird Project in February 2021 which consists of 1 Hub carer, supporting 8 satellite carers. The Mockingbird constellation found the support extremely beneficial where they are able to access support from the other carers that are part of the constellation. We have not had any disrupted placements within the Mockingbird carers' constellation.

The Fostering Service has continued to work closely with the Independent Reviewing Service for looked after children in ensuring that we work as a team around the child. There is an appointed lead from the IRO service who works closely with the fostering service and has acted as a link between the two service areas.

Feedback from the IRO link:

*I have been the IRO link for the fostering service for the last 18 months, and I have been privileged to attend both the service-wide meetings as well the smaller team meetings, within which I was able to relay and share key messages to the fostering service and in turn to the IRO service.*

*I have also observed the challenges the fostering service has faced with staffing changes, but this has been managed in a positive manner by the Head of Service and Service Manager currently in post. There is a clear vision for the fostering service to have a stable, consistent and committed workforce, which is skilled at delivering a good service to the foster carers and in turn to the children and young people Looked After by the Local Authority.*

*As the link IRO for the service, I have also been able to contribute to the implementation of the Mockingbird Fostering Model. I have also been a departmental member for the fostering panel and I*

*have seen the panel grow and fulfil its purpose to a high standard. The pool of panel members has grown and it is a lot more diverse.*

*The introduction of the permanency tracking panel tracks the permanence for children and young people to ensure their plans are not delayed, and the panel also ensures that their placements are regulated. There is a drive to ensure that foster carers reviews are taking place in a timely manner and the appointment of a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer is assisting with this.*

*Overall, it has been a positive and progressive year for the fostering service and I hope that this trend continues under the current management, who are open to suggestions and critical feedback.*

## **4. Priorities for 2022/23**

There has been a lot of activity in the Fostering Service over the last 6 months which has been geared towards the recruitment of foster carers as well as developing the practise within the service. The main priorities for the upcoming year are as follows:

### **4.1 Recruitment and Retention**

Recruitment of skilled and committed foster carers to meet the complex and changing needs of our looked after children continues to be a key focus of the fostering service in 2022/23. Our marketing strategy for recruitment continues to use online and published media forums, local media outlets and social media platforms to encourage people to apply to become foster carers in Haringey.

In addition to the above marketing strategies, the service is providing live information sessions on Facebook which have been delivered by Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers jointly. We are also providing daytime coffee mornings for anyone interested to join and have an informal conversation about fostering.

Over the last 6 months, we have seen the development of marketing strategies to raise Haringey's fostering profile within the service and have seen an increase in initial enquiries that the service is receiving. The initial enquiries into the service have increased from an average 1-2 enquiries per month, to 5-7 initial enquiries over the last 3 months. The service has a target to recruit 10 new fostering families in 2022/23. Currently we have 5 newly approved Foster Carers with 13 ongoing assessments in Stage 2 of the recruitment process.

There has been a significant improvement with timescales now averaging between 4-6 months in comparison the previous year (2020/21), where assessment timeframes for completion were averaging at 422 days.

## **4.2 Annual Reviews**

Foster carers' annual reviews are an important part of fostering service functions. Previously there was a backlog of annual reviews due to the service having capacity challenges. The service now has a senior practitioner solely devoted to undertaking annual reviews. In addition, the Fostering Service is being supported by 2 Child Protection Conference Chairs who are able to complete annual reviews for the service, which is helping.

## **4.3 Practice**

### **4.4 Training and Development of Foster Carers**

An extensive range of training for foster carers is outlined in the fostering services training brochure. The carers also have access to KCA (Knowledge, Change, Action) and the Community Care online platform which enables them to complete a wide range of online courses, access reading materials, research, case studies, articles, and quizzes. In addition to mandatory training courses, carers are supported to undertake training in key areas as follows:

- Training around exploitation and contextual safeguarding
- Digital addiction and online safety.
- Children with complex needs and disability.
- Adoption – training is being delivered by Adopt London North (ALN) on transitions and the new adoption model.
- Mental health
- Diversity issues including gender identity, sexuality, cultural topics.

### **4.5 Training and Development of staff**

Staff development through regular training, supervision and appraisal are a key focus in the service. We continue to drive the practice in the service and ensure that our foster carers are being supported and are equipped with the right tools to improve outcomes for our looked after children. Key training areas include Secure Base Model, Attachment and Mentalisation. Staff also receive regular training on report writing, undertaking foster carers assessment (Form F), special guardianship assessment and permanency planning.

In addition, Haringey Fostering Service have also identified training with Adopt London North for delivery on key areas including

- Transitions
- Life story work
- Transracial placements
- Foster to Adopt placements.

## **4.6 Permanency**

Achieving permanency for all looked after children is at the forefront of all Fostering service activities. A Permanency Tracker is now in place which is regularly updated at fortnightly Permanency Tracking Panel. This will prevent any drift in permanency planning and ensure that all permanency options are being tracked. This will also allow children to be matched in the appropriate placements at the earliest opportunity.

There has also been the introduction of regular meetings with Adopt London North to highlight the complex cases and to ensure that family finding is timely and effective.

Both Service Managers for Fostering and Children in Care work closely in delivering Permanency Planning Meetings and regular case discussions for a joined up approach.

## **4.7 Feedback and Audits**

The service has been working with our foster carers in developing a satisfaction survey which will feed into our service delivery. Over the upcoming year it is vital to use feedback from our foster carers alongside auditing to inform ongoing practice developments. This will be achieved through:

- Feedback collated from the foster carers' satisfaction survey.
- We will be working with Partners in Practice (PIP) to arrange a foster carers feedback event 'We want to hear your voice' which will be facilitated by PIP.
- Managers to undertake regular dip sample audits on foster carers case files.

There have been many developments within the Fostering Service over the last 6 months with a continued focus on driving practise and skilling up our workforce to deliver a GOOD service.

Overall, the Fostering Service has high aspirations and identified objectives to move forward and deliver a high quality service to our looked after children in Haringey.