



Haringey Council

Agenda item:

Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee

On 7 December 2009

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Report Title: Proposed improvements to the in-house fostering service | |
| Forward Plan reference number (if applicable): <i>n/a</i> | |
| Report of: Deputy Director Children and Families | |
| Wards(s) affected: All | Report for: Information |
| 1. Purpose (That is, the decision required) To provide an update on Haringey in-house fostering service and the changes proposed to improve performance. | |
| 2. Recommendations Members of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee are asked to note the contents of the report. | |
| Report Authorised by: Eleanor Brazil Deputy Director Children and Families | |
| Contact Officer: Roy Choudhury Telephone: 3635 E-mail: roy.choudhury@haringey.gov.uk | |

Background

Over the past three years the fostering service has failed to reach local performance targets for recruitment of new foster carers. The demand for local in-house carers has increased during this time, particularly during the last year, when numbers of children in care has risen by about 50 at any one time.

The cost of placements in independent fostering agency placements is significantly higher than the cost of in-house placements. One action in the plan to contain and reduce expenditure in relation to placements is about increasing the number of in-house foster carers.

We have extended our recruitment campaign and this has had some impact. However the fostering service has not been able to maximise the potential of the campaign for a number of reasons. No single operational manager has an oversight or responsibility to oversee the recruitment of foster carers and this has resulted in poor co-ordination in responding to enquiries and delays in the processing of applications.

The present structure of the fostering service can be found in Appendix 1
The social workers in the under 11s and over 11s teams are required to support existing foster carers who have children placed with them, as well as undertaking initial assessments and more detailed assessment (home studies) for prospective foster carers. The support that is provided to current foster carers by the social workers to prevent placement breakdown, is always a priority and this has had an impact on the capacity of the service to assess new foster carers.

Proposed Improvement Change

We have created a temporary team from existing fostering service resources, by relocating one social worker from the over 11s team, one from under 11s team and one from the private fostering team, to form a pilot recruitment and assessment team. The numbers of carers has been falling due to deregistrations and retirement of foster carers. In addition we are currently supporting a reduced number of private fostering arrangements, having received fewer notifications.

The pilot Recruitment and Assessment Team will be led by a team manager who currently has responsibility for the private fostering team (and who will retain that responsibility). The team manager will oversee all foster care recruitment and will be expected to increase efficiency and also drive up the quality of our foster care.

The work of the team will be:

Fostering Campaigns

Taking a lead to deliver the recruitment strategy

Making links within the local community/ community groups to targeting recruitment in the areas of need, increasing the numbers of fostering enquiries.

Information Events

To arrange and facilitate regular public events to raise the profile of fostering and increase awareness of the fostering task.

The team will also attend local community events, taking the opportunity for formal and informal face to face discussion with the public (prospective applicants)

Enquiries

To receive all calls, and applications from enquirers, through a daily recruitment duty service, providing clear accurate information at the first point of contact. Applicants receiving an immediate response to enquiries and more detailed information within 24 hours.

Making assessments during initial contacts to counsel out unsuitable applicants.

Applicants seen within 10 days of their enquiry

(Sooner if they are available)

Initial Assessment

To visit applicants at home to carry out initially assess s the suitability of applicants for the fostering task. Speeding up the process of visiting most suitable applicants and fast tracking the most suitable applicants through the assessment process.

To also counsel out unsuitable of applicants at this stage.

Preparation Training

To deliver regular preparing training groups for prospective applicants in order to select the most suitable applicants making decisions about the applicants to be fast tracked through the recruitment processes

(Applicants with experience of fostering and applicants representing the targeted groups i.e. white UK applicants.

Foster Carer Assessments (Home Study)

To carry out assessments to ensure the skills and knowledge of the prospective foster carers are evidenced and meet the highest of standards.

To speed up the process of this assessment process to ensure prospective foster carers are approved to undertake the fostering tasks within agreed timescales.

It is envisaged that this team will:

- Increase the numbers of enquirers
- Raise the understanding and awareness of fostering within the borough
- Provide a more effective and efficient first response to enquirers
- Counsel out applicants at an earlier stage, reducing fall out in the later stages of the process
- Fast track the most suitable carers
- Speed up the recruitment process from 8/9 months (from first enquiry to approval) to 5 months
- Recruit a minimum of 12 new foster carers within a 6 month period.

Resources

While three social workers in this team at this stage will meet the needs of this service, it is envisaged that this will need to be reviewed and increased if the targets are to be met. In addition, independent assessors maybe required if numbers of assessments surpass the capacity of the team.

Future arrangements

The Deputy Director has commissioned a review of the in-house fostering service to run alongside this pilot. This will be completed within 2 months and will inform proposals on future permanent arrangements, including whether this pilot team should become permanent.

3. Use of Appendices / Tables / Photographs

Appendix 1: Foster carer assessment process