

Agenda item:

[No.]

Children and Young People's Advisory Committee On

Report Title: In –house fostering service

Forward Plan reference number (if applicable): n/a

Report of: **The Director of The Children and Young People's Service**

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: **Information**

1. Purpose (That is, the decision required)

This report outlines the proposed changes to the in-house fostering service which are intended to improve both recruitment of foster carers and the service itself

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)

3. Recommendations

Members of the Corporate Parenting AC are asked to note the contents of the report

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4. Director of Finance Comments

5. Head of Legal Services Comments

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

1. Background information

Proposed Changes to the Fostering Service

We are very aware of the importance of the in-house fostering service and this is increasingly so as the numbers of children in care has risen and the complexity of the needs of the children has also increased. The benefits of a good in-house service which can respond flexibly, is local so children can remain in the same school or other provision, and contact with families is easier, are well understood. Our policy is and should be to only use the independent fostering sector where our service cannot meet the specific needs of a child or children. However to achieve this, we must ensure continued proactive and successful recruitment of new carers, excellent support to existing carers and robust attention to maintaining high quality from our carers.

Difficulties in the service in achieving this in the past few years have been apparent. Support was provided by the Tavistock over a 2 year period but this did not create the positive difference in service delivery that is required. This does not mean that there was not good work being done by many staff within the service but it has not had the impact that is needed. More recently the Deputy Director commissioned a review by an independent consultant to understand the challenges facing the service, how they were being addressed and how they could be improved. This work was completed in December 2009, and discussed with members of the fostering team in January 2010. This proposal to restructure the service follows from that review.

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 significantly during 2009, when numbers of children in care has risen by over 50 at any one time, making it more urgent that the issues within the fostering service are addressed.

During the past year 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.

In response to these and other concerns the Deputy Director commissioned the review to identify the way forward. The review identified a number of issues such as working practices, working environment and communication which are not relevant to this proposed re-structure but will be responded to by developing an action plan with the managers and staff of the service as part of the implementation of the new structure.

What is clear from the review and from the factual information on recruitment, numbers of carers, numbers of allegations in relation to quality of care provided by carers, is that currently the work of the Fostering Service needs to significantly improve. This is unlikely to happen without restructuring the service, and alongside that addressing the identified issues in relation to systems, processes and working practices that act as barriers and blockages to good practice.

Proposed Changes

The numbers of carers has been falling due to deregistration and retirement of foster carers. In addition we are currently supporting a reduced number of private fostering arrangements, having received fewer notifications.

In October 2009, to improve recruitment, a pilot recruitment and assessment team was created from the existing fostering service resources. One social worker from the over 11s team, one from under 11s team and one from the private fostering team, formed the team.

The pilot Recruitment and Assessment Team is being led by a team manager who currently has responsibility for the private fostering team. The team manager oversees all foster care recruitment and is expected to increase efficiency and also drive up the quality of our foster carers as well as the quality of the assessments.

1. It is proposed that a permanent team will now be established to have responsibility for recruitment. Further work is required to consider whether private fostering remains within this service as part of Kinship care or would be better located in another part of the service ie Safeguarding and Support.
- 2..To amalgamate the Under 11 and Over 11 team into one task centred fostering team to focus on support, stability and retention of foster carers. The aim is to change the focus of support to foster carers from basic advice and guidance to an approach which is inclusive of the emotional impact of caring for looked after children and the practicalities of managing this on a day to day basis. This new team is to be led by an experienced and qualified team manager and supported by 2 senior practitioners, who will have a reduced caseload of foster carers in addition to 6 experienced social workers.
3. That an action plan will be drawn up to address the issues of working practice, communication and poor environment that negatively impact on the quality of the work of the service.

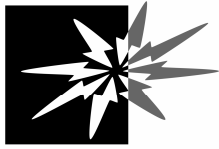
4. The link between the Fostering Service and Placement Service needs to be strengthened. The teams need to work more cohesively to improve the matching and thereby improving stability for the looked after children of Haringey. For this reason we are moving the placement service to be co-located at 40 Cumberland Road to enable better integration and support of the new commissioning and placement service. The Placement Service will now become fully responsible for all the steps in the placement process for in house placements. Fostering duty will no longer be used to contact in house carers.
5. To support all the above process and to manage the creation of the new Commissioning and Placement service a slight alignment of the business support unit with the creation of one senior Finance office and one senior Admin Officer sitting underneath the Service Business manager will be necessary.

The proposed structure for the Fostering Service as a part of the new Commissioning and Placement Service can be found in Appendix 2.

Advertising Campaigns

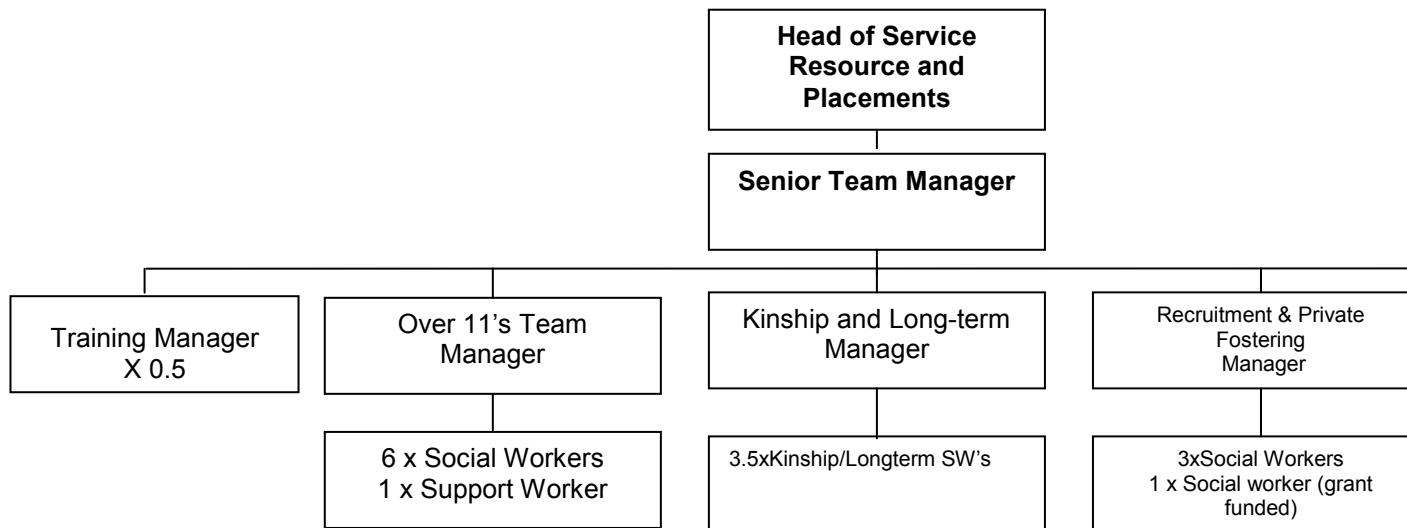
Alongside the re-organisation of the service, we are reviewing the way in which we advertise for new foster carers. We need to ensure that recruitment is both effective and very identifiably a Haringey recruitment process. The review will focus on the whole recruitment process and specifically include:

- The quality of adverts used
- A more targeted recruitment campaign which links advert placement with take-up and conversion (into carer applications) rates and is more focussed on the target audiences
- The initial information pack sent out to interested people and the timeliness with which that is done
- The timing and agenda for the information sessions
- The follow-up and subsequent assessment and training programmes
- Approval and induction processes

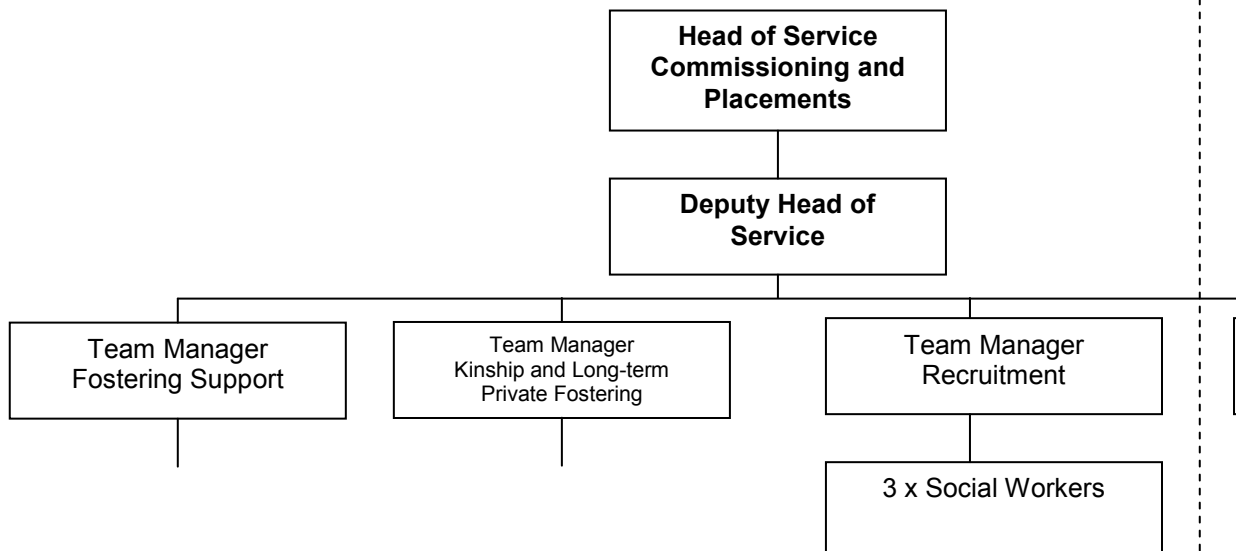


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Appendix 1 – Current structure of Fostering Service



Appendix 2 – Proposed structure of Fostering Service



1 x Practitioner
1 x Senior Practitioner

6 x Social Workers

1 x Senior Practitioner

4xKinship/Longterm SW's
1.5xPrivate Fostering SW's