



<b>Report for:</b>	Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee	<b>Item number</b>	3
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<b>Title:</b>	Annual Report of the Fostering Service
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<b>Report authorised by :</b>	Debbie Haith
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<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Janice Darling
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>Report for Key/Non Key Decision:</b>
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### **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

This report provides a description of the structure, aims and duties of the fostering service and details the performance of the service over the last 12 months in addition to outlining key service improvements.

### **2. Introduction**

The fostering service is located within commissioning and placements which provides a range of foster placements for children in care. The fostering team assess and support these task centred foster carers as well as Kinship foster carers where children and young people are placed by the local authority within their family network (family or friends). The fostering service also assesses and monitors Private fostering arrangements.

At present the service functions are provided by four teams, there are plans for a reorganisation of the service for efficiency, which will see the formation of just two teams with existing staff. One team will focus on recruitment and assessment and one team will provide intensive support to all of our foster carers. This new structure will be implemented by October 2012.



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The activities of the service are governed by the Fostering Regulations. National minimum standards 2011 and are regularly inspected by Ofsted. The last Ofsted inspection of the service in 2010 found the service to be satisfactory.

The fostering team works together with partners across the children and young people's service as well as with health and education partners to achieve best outcomes for children and young people in foster placements.

### **Present Service Structure**

Head of Service

Senior Team Manager

Learning and Development manager ( P/T)

1x Team manager under 11s Team and 5 x SWs

1x Team Manager over 11s Team /Private Fostering and x 3 SWs

1x Team Manager Kinship and Long Term Team and 5 x SWs

Vacant Team Manager Recruitment and assessment Team (pilot scheme) 1x SW

### **Structure for the new service**

Head of Service

Deputy Head of Service

Learning and Development Manager

Team managers (2)

Practice Managers (2)

Social workers (14)

Assistant social workers (2)

## **3. Background information**

### **Recruitment**

The fostering service is engaged in advertising in order to recruit foster cares in partnership with the marketing and communications team.

Our marketing strategy is developed based on a gap analysis (services we have not been able to provide at the levels required) analysis of the previous years performance data and cost effectiveness of the marketing activities.

Our target was to provide 48 new foster placements over 3 years. We have focused on recruitment of 20 new households to include white UK carers and provide placements for sibling groups.

The marketing strategy provides details of the recruitment activity which included stalls in the high street, talking to the public, leafleting public venues, open information sessions, articles and adverts in the press.



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We were supported in these activities by our foster cares.

The fostering website has been updated and we have produced an advert featuring our Foster carers and staff providing information about fostering for Haringey, which is now available on the Haringey website. We continue to develop and maintain our partnerships with the North London Fostering Consortium (NLFC) for advertising and pooling of resources. The NLFC website was launched providing joint advertising.

We have produced a teenage foster carer recruitment film for information and publicity as a joint venture with the consortium, without a collaborative approach this would not have been possible. The film has been recognised by Fostering Network, BAAF and DFE all of whom are interested in attending the launch.

Our ability to work collaboratively means we are able to host events and activities that would be too financially restrictive as a single borough.

We share the delivery of prospective foster carers training to reduce the waiting time for these courses; prospective carers are now able to attend any of the five boroughs preparation groups.

There was some initial concern that we might lose prospective applicants to other consortium boroughs in order to address this concern, we have an agreement within the consortium that where applicants seek to change from the authority where they have made their initial application, they will be required to wait for 12 months before their application will be taken up by the new authority. This approach has been successful, in that there have not been any applicant withdrawals following training. However there is some flexibility and Fostering managers may discuss taking over an application in certain circumstances i.e. A Jewish applicant encouraged by Barnet to transfer to Haringey as we had Jewish children to place.

#### Performance 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 Recruitment of task centred carers

The service received 318 fostering enquiries about fostering last year, from this number 17 households were approved providing 26 placements. Of the number approved three households were recruited from independent fostering agencies. A majority of the new fostering carers live in Haringey. We have also recruited carers who live in Enfield, Waltham Forest and Hackney ,

- Between the initial enquiry and information session – 41.85% drop out. This is usually due to the applicants gaining further information about what is expected and decide that fostering is not right for them.



- Between the information session and the initial visit – 55.87% drop out  
At this stage the applicants have received more detailed information about fostering and have had an opportunity to hear from an existing foster carer and possibly an informal discussion with staff, providing further clarity about the fostering task and criteria that has to be fulfilled. The applicant may opt out at this stage or may have been advised by the social workers to delay their application, i.e. an applicant due to have a baby in 3 months would be advised to wait until baby is 9 to 12 months old before apply again. Or the realisation that they will not be able to work full time and foster.
- Between the initial visit and preparation training group – 62% drop out –  
In the main the fostering team will rule applicants out at this stage, having visited their home and gathered personal information that may indicate that they are unsuitable or it is not the right time for them to foster. There are a range of reasons for ruling applicants out, these may be related to their living conditions, the needs of their own children, or lack of initial understanding of the challenges fostering may present.  
The team are currently working on the development of a feedback tool, in order to collate qualitative data to capture the reasons being provided by applicants for withdrawing and reasons for social workers counselling applicants out. This is being progressed as part of the service efficiency review as outlined below.
- 17 applicants were ruled out or dropped out during the assessment stage; this is 54.84% of people that started the assessment process. Some applicants find the assessment process too intrusive or have a change of mind or personal circumstances during the assessment process. In addition on closer scrutiny the fostering service might consider applicants to be unsuitable due to their attitudes or understanding of children .

### **Processes**

- From the first phone call / contact to approval at the fostering panel should be no more than 6 months
- Information sessions are monthly
- Initial assessments are carried out within 2 weeks of information session ( or sooner)
- Preparation groups are available across the consortium monthly( 3 day course)
- The final assessment should take no longer than 3/4 months to complete, however, this is dependent on the complexity of the family and any issues of concern that may arise. The recruitment manager tracks and monitors the team performance monthly. The comprehensive assessment and



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approval of applicants over the last year were in the main completed within a 3- 9 month period .

- Two assessments were completed within 3 months, Three were completed within 4 months, two within 5 months and four within 6 months. There were a number of assessments that were outside of the 4 month assessment period due to the complexity of issues and panel availability. We have taken the step to increased the number of fostering panels each month from one to two to minimise further delays of approvals .
- Fostering panels are now held twice a month

We are currently benchmarking our service against members of the consortium, to develop and improve our performance. We are also gathering information about the fostering population in Haringey, identifying the numbers of Independent fostering agency foster carers and other local authority carers living in Haringey. This data will help with our recruitment marketing strategy .

Only approving 17 new task centred last year meant that we were unable to match our 2010/ 2011 performance (22 approved carers) The plans for the restructuring of the service will increase the capacity for recruitment during the coming year.

### Key targets

- To provide additional foster placements to meet our target of 48 placements by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014
- To reduce the number of applicant fall out at assessment stage.
- To continue to focus on recruitment for sibling groups, White UK carers, Jewish carers for short term and long term placements, carers for babies 0 – 2, teenagers and providing placements for more troubled (challenging) children/ young people.
- Set up a remand foster placement scheme and parent and child assessment placements (specialist carers) in partnership with NLFC.
- Progress plans for the **introduce a carer scheme** as we know that word of mouth is a successful recruitment strategy, our carers will receive a financial reward when one of the people they introduce is approved at the fostering panel.
- Through the NLFC to utilise technology to reach a larger audience for recruitment i.e. set up Facebook .

### Foster Placements as at 15/ 8/ 2012

### Active short term task centred carers



Short term task centred foster carers care for children and young people on a short term basis, until permanent plans are made for them. Therefore children and young people could be in placement for a few days, a few months or 2 / 3 years depending on the circumstances of their individual situations. The recruitment of carers as outlined above is in the main to recruit foster carers to care for this group of children.

There are currently 82 fostering households on our register for children aged under 11 years, 58 are actively fostering providing 68 placements. There are 46 fostering households registered to care for young people aged 12 years and over, 26 fostering households are actively fostering providing 53 placements.

A total of 84 active fostering households providing 123 short term placements.

The above placement numbers ( 123) are not the maximum number of placements available, some fostering households are approved and registered for one child as they only have one bedroom. However on occasion if it is considered to be appropriate they are able to provide placements for two children from a sibling group, if it is appropriate for the children to share a bedroom. We would not allow children who are unrelated to share a bedroom.

There are 46 carers who are not active at the moment, 21 fostering households are to be de registered, reasons for de registration are varied, carers retiring, illness, family commitments, moved away, in some cases the fostering service do not feel that the carers are suitable to continue to foster.

There are 16 fostering households who are taking a break from fostering but remain registered. Reasons for this include, having a recovery period due to illness, moving house, travelling abroad, maternity period. Of this number there are 3 carers who have chosen to provide supported lodgings to the young people in their care in order that they are able to continue to live in the fostering household post 18. All of these carers will return to fostering at some stage.

There are 9 fostering households that are not active due to concerns about standards of care provided to children formerly in placement. This ranges from carers management of behaviour, health and safety in the fostering household, failure to comply with the requirements of the fostering regulations. The fostering team will work with these carers to improve their practice. Some of these carers will return to our active list and a number may be de registered.

The service strives to maintain the highest standards of care to children and will challenge poor child care practice This actions has an impact on the foster placement resources reducing the number of placements available for varying periods of time.



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Over the last year we have not been able to recruit the numbers of fostering households needed to offset the losses de to de registrations. However, with the changes planned for the service our capacity to recruit will address this deficit.

### **Respite Foster carers**

There are 8 approved respite Foster carers providing 14 respite placements. These foster carers are those who show good potential as foster carers, but due to work commitments or family commitments they are unable to provide a full time fostering resource. They will only provide care to children or young people who need a temporary placement for a week end or a week during school holidays. A majority of our respite carers are teachers who work full time.

In addition respite carers may offer a regular break to our task centred carers who may have challenging placements in order that they can have a break.

The 11 placements they provide are only available for very short planned periods.

### **Long Term Foster Carers**

There 18 Long term fostering households, some have been recruited as outlined above. Some were previously short term task centred carers.

These carers make a commitment to care for a particular child offering permanency until the child reaches the age of independence. These carers often choose to provide supported lodgings in order for young people to remain in the household post 18years. If young people do move on, long term carers are matched to another child or young person.

### **Kinship Foster Carers Known as (Family and Friends Carers)**

Kinship foster carers are not recruited as above, they put themselves forward to care for children from within their family network. They are assessed by the service as to their suitability to provide a placement for a child in care; they account for 48 Fostering households providing 69 placements .Kinship care is also governed by the fostering regulations.

Over the last year we have seen major growth and activity in our Kinship placements when compared to the number of children being placed with stranger carers. Currently there are 16 kinship assessments underway, with the view to placing children if the carers are assessed to be suitable.

Kinship carers can present challenges for the service in that they do not always willingly comply with some of the fostering requirements i.e. training or keeping



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daily records of the children's activities. They see their role differently to that of our recruited carers, some of our Kinship carers are the grand-parents of the children placed. These aspects continue to be a challenge which is being addressed by providing clearer information at the point of placement about expectations and that they sign up to this at an earlier stage of the process.

### **Key Improvements**

- We aim to increase the number of Kinship carers attending training and completing the training and development standards.

### **Short Breaks (Family Link)**

Although short breaks are governed by the fostering regulations, the Family Link team is located within the Children with additional needs service.

There are 36 approved Family Link carers providing 57 overnight care arrangements for children and young people, and 26 day care arrangements.

The children referred for short breaks have a range of additional emotional and physical needs. Family Link carers are respite Foster carers and provide overnight stays for some children and young people usually one weekend each month or one overnight stay each week. Some carers take children into their homes for day care and do not provide overnight s. Whatever arrangements that will provide the support required by the child's family is considered.

The service is presently under review, there has not been any advertising for family link recently and only two short breaks carers were approved last year. While short breaks are valuable for some children and young people, the service provides a range of alternative supports for families, providing a choice of resources available to them.

### **Key Improvement**

- To give further consideration to the integration of Family Link carers into the fostering service for recruitment assessment and support.

### **Support provided to carers**

All Haringey foster carers have a named supervising social worker who visits them regularly, to monitor their care of children and young people and provide support. There is an active foster care association who provide emotional and practical support to their peers. Our focus is placement stability, reducing placement moves and improving outcomes for children. Foster carers have direct access to local partners in health and education who also provide them with advice and support.





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We have developed a more holistic approach to supporting foster care families recognising the role our foster carers children play in the fostering household and the emotional impact of fostering for them.

The Haringey Tavistock partnership has supported Foster carers as well as their children to manage the emotional impact of caring for some very traumatised children and young people. We are required to provide foster placements for children and young people who present challenges and or have a range of complex needs, we support our carers to meet these challenges, our behaviour management policy has been updated and behaviour management training for all carers is being delivered.

We provide advice and guidance outside of office hours. Within the new service structure the Assistant Social Workers will work more intensively with carers around behaviour management techniques and provide additional guidance as required.

### **Key Improvement**

- The fostering service restructure will provide more intensive support to carers.
- To further develop work with the Haringey Tavistock partnership to address the support needs of our foster families and their development of understanding of the emotional impact of trauma for children and young people; aid children placement stability and the development of resilience for looked after children.

### **Foster carers Learning and Development**

The fostering service learning and development manager takes a lead on all learning and development for our carers. The learning and development strategy is based on the requirements of the fostering standards, analysis of learning evaluations and outcomes (carers practice). Training is very important in order for foster carers to manage the challenges being presented by children and young people. Carers usually complete all of the core/ mandatory training within 2 to 3 years of fostering (child protection first aid National minimum standards etc.)

We have recently considered a range of methods through which to support our carers learning. We are promoting a more individualised learning programme, which focuses on further development of their knowledge and experience in areas of their interest and areas specific to the needs of the child or young person in placement.

We recognise the diverse range of our carers learning styles and have encouraged a wide range of learning methods i.e. focused reading,



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observations, opportunities for on line learning and supporting carers to access training together with social worker s i.e. LSCB courses.

Sixty one of our carers have completed TSD's (training and development standards) so far.

### **Key improvements**

- Further develop methods through which to measure the integration of learning in to our carers practice
- Supporting and development of carers literacy and IT skills to promote better educational outcomes for children and young people and to ensure they are safeguarded.

### **Fostering Panel**

The Haringey fostering service has a fostering panel that consider and make recommendations to the agency decision maker about, the applications of all prospective foster carers and the re-approval of existing foster carers. The panel also have a quality assurance role. The work of the panel is governed by the Fostering Regulations 2011. In line with good practice, we have an independent chair, two departmental members and four independent panel members, two with fostering experience, one foster carer and one member who has been in foster care.

We are required to maintain a central list of people able to sit at panel when needed to ensure the panel is quorate and to provide professional advice as required. We have a central list that includes suitable independent members, as well as a Haringey councillor, legal and medical advisors.

Over the last year the Panel meetings have increased from one meeting each month to two meetings each month in order to meet the demands of the service.

The panel has two business meetings and two training events each year. Individual panel members are able to access the NLFC training as required. Each panel member is appraised each year by the panel chair and there are regular feedback meetings between the panel chair and agency decision maker.

### **Complaints decision made**

There were no referrals to the Independent review mechanism the regulatory body which hears appeals from applicants and existing foster carers who were not recommended for approval by the panel and agency decision maker.



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### **Key target for Improvement**

- To support the work of the panel, we continue to recruit panel members for our central list from education and health.

### **Complaints ( Foster carers)**

There were 10 complaints / allegations which resulted in 2 de registrations. Eight carers are being reassessed as the allegations were related to standards of care. The behaviour management policy guidance and training and more support from the service will improve the standards of practice in our fostering households.

### **Complaints about the service**

There were 10 complaints these included the length of time it has taken to conclude investigations, (as above) delays related to payments, service changes i.e. De-commissioning of the computer services and complaints about social workers. In the main the complaints about social workers have been related to social workers challenging standards of practice. The service reviews complaints, learns from them and makes adjustments and improvements.

### **Private fostering (PF)**

Private Fostering is governed by the Private Fostering Regulations 2009. and the services to Private fostering arrangements regularly inspected by Ofsted. The responsibility for Private fostering is held within fostering service.

Where a child or young person is not related to their care givers, are under the age of 16 years and live in the household of their care giver for a period of 28 days or more, this is considered to be a private fostering arrangement. These children are considered to be “children in need”. The private foster carers and or the parents of the child have a responsibility to notify the local authority of this private fostering arrangement. Professionals also have a duty to inform the local authority ( Private fostering team) of any arrangement they may encounter in the course of their duties that they consider to be a private fostering arrangement.

The fostering service completes the child in need assessment and an assessment of the suitability of the private foster carer.

All private fostering arrangements have an allocated supervising social worker who visits to monitor the arrangement and provide advice and support to private foster carers. Private foster carers have access to our in house foster carers training i.e. Safe care and first aid behaviour management etc.

There are currently 18 private Fostering arrangements being assessed and supported by the fostering service.



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Under the private fostering regulations the fostering service is required to raise awareness about private fostering amongst the public and professional groups. The team has held briefing sessions for professionals (education, housing, and health partners) Held public information sessions and had stalls in the high street and at community events to raise awareness.

The service works closely with the marketing and communications team, who have produced publicity materials for raising awareness (which have been commended)

The information booklets for private foster carers and parents and booklet for professionals have been updated.

There is an improvement action plan for private fostering outlining key improvement targets

### **Service Efficiency Review**

As part of the preparation for restructuring of the service a major review of our service efficiency has been undertaken in order to ensure that the service is fit for purpose in the new structure i.e. Services delivered in a timely way, systems in place for collection of data to support performance management. All staff have been consulted and involved in this review for ownership of improvements.

### **Key Service Improvements**

A service improvement plan is being constructed; a steering group has been set up with representations from across children's services which includes health and education partners to contribute to planning and improvements:

- Prepared for a short notice Ofsted inspection.
- Service is fit for purpose
- Increase the number of in house fostering resources
- Further develop joint initiatives through the NLFC
- Systems in place to encourage and support better outcomes for children
- Improve consultation methods and collection of qualitative data to be drawn from foster carers, children in care, foster carers own children, private foster carers, kinship carers and children in kinship placements to better evidence outcomes.
- Improve the collection of performance management data
- Restructure of the service to improve efficiency of fostercarer recruitment and support.