



**Haringey Council**

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Panel 27th September 2012</b>	<b>Item Number:</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Fostering Service Report - update</b>		
<b>Report Authorised by:</b>	<b>Libby Blake Director Children and Young People's Service</b>		
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	<b>Wendy Tomlinson – Head of Service Commissioning and Placements</b>		
<b>Ward(s) affected: all</b>	<b>Report for Key/Non Key Decisions:</b>		

## **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

This report provides a brief description of the aims and duties of the fostering service and an analysis of the current challenges. It outlines the strategies in place to address these challenges in order to improve outcomes for children and young people in care in foster placement. Our target is to achieve the necessary progress and move from an Ofsted grading of a satisfactory service to one of good or outstanding service.

## **2. Background**

The fostering service is located within the commissioning and placements service which provides a range of foster placements for children in care. The fostering team recruit, assess, train and support foster carers including 'Kinship' foster carers (these are placements where children and young people are placed by the local authority within their family network).

The activities of the service are governed by the Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards 2011 and are inspected by Ofsted. The last Ofsted inspection of the service in 2011 found the service to be satisfactory.



**Haringey Council**

### **3. Recommendations**

This report is for information and consideration by members.

### **4. Key issues**

- 4.1 The continuing challenge for fostering services is the recruitment and retention of good quality foster carers.

The Fostering Network and British Association of Adoption and Fostering produce a range of research related to recruitment in fostering as there is a national shortage of foster carers and all local authorities continue to struggle to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet their demand.

The Fostering Network and BAAF provide guidance related to the most successful marketing and campaigning strategies, in addition to the service structure and customer service response that supports successful recruitment. Some of the important factors are:

- Marketing strategies
- Timely response and information to enquirers i.e. good customer services efficient communication and administration processes
- Packages of support i.e. payments, face to face and emergency support, training
- Perceived value the role foster carers as a part of the team involved in promoting the child's wellbeing.

We are competing in a very small market of fostering resources, with neighbouring local authorities. We also have two independent agencies on our door step (in Southgate, Enfield) plus a number of independent agencies who cast their recruitment nets widely. Successful recruitment is based on how well the above factors are delivered and finding an edge that makes applicants favour a particular agency. Some independent agencies and authorities are able to offer higher allowance payments, two weeks holiday each year, provide respite support regularly (sometimes monthly) for carers etc. This type of support may attract certain applicants depending on their motivation. Haringey have addressed these areas in order to compete in this market, i.e. our allowances to carers is similar to allowances paid by some independent agencies and local authorities

Our marketing strategies are similar to other authorities and agencies. Haringey's marketing materials were 'highly commended' at a recent marketing awards event. Our packages of support to foster carers have been developed to compete with others as far as we are able to within financial constraints. The Haringey 'edge' we believe is the *supportive fostering family feeling* that is encouraged by the high profile role our foster carers have in recruitment, welcoming new carers into the fold, offering advice and guidance and encouraging carers, foster children and carers own children's involvement in a range of social events.



## **Haringey Council**

The areas for further development are to improve customer services and develop more efficient administrative processes. We are undertaking analysis work on the latter with support from our colleagues in Strategy and Business Intelligence.

### 4.2 Recruitment / Managing Resources

The fostering service is engaged in advertising in partnership with the Corporate Marketing and Communications team order to recruit foster carers.

Our marketing strategy is developed based on a gap analysis. We have used our knowledge of the population of the borough to gain insight into the characteristics of the people most likely to be interested in fostering. We have also analysed performance data to assess the effectiveness of marketing activities and to further inform our understanding.

Our marketing performance is monitored monthly and three monthly following specific campaigns to evaluate its effectiveness through the number of enquiries generated, and the progression of these applicants through the assessment process.

Our performance figures during 2010/2011 suggested that although a large campaign during the Fostering Network foster care fortnight may have generated a high number of enquires, there were high applicant fall out rates. At these events there is not much opportunity to talk to interested people in depth; the leaflets can only provide basic information to generate interest.

The team have attended Area Forum meetings to speak to those attending about fostering; these activities did not generate any applications.

Our analysis currently is that a ratio of 200 enquires are required to produce 10 approved foster carers. Our marketing strategy has been further developed to continue to target all the homes in the borough, adverts and articles in the press and Haringey People, in addition to a continuous flow of information about fostering produced each month. We have used large posters across the borough, with blanket coverage in Wood Green to capture the interest of shoppers who live in Haringey and the four neighbouring boroughs.

Last year 2011/2012 there were 318 enquires producing 17 fostering approvals. Our target 2010 /2014 is to recruit 48 new foster placements (over the 3 years) to date we have recruited 39 and on target for 48. Whilst we have had some success in recruiting white UK/ European foster carers this is an area for continued to focus.

- Information sessions for interested enquirers are monthly
- Initial assessments are carried out within 2 weeks of information session
- 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.
- Fostering panels are held twice each month to ensure approvals are not delayed.



We continue to develop and maintain our partnerships with the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC) for advertising, pooling of resources and new initiatives. The NLAFC 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. Our ability to work collaboratively means we are able to host events and activities that would be unaffordable 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.

The training managers from all five boroughs share information about foster carers learning and development plans and facilitate foster carers attendance at cross consortium training if spaces are available at reduced costs.

We are now in the second year of our Consortium agreement to share foster placement resources, as an alternative to commissioning placements with independent fostering agencies which can be more costly. Over the last two years Haringey have provided four short term placements to the consortium and Haringey have placed seven children with foster carers in the consortium.

We are currently in the process of setting up a Remand Fostering Scheme and a parent and baby assessment placement scheme in collaboration with our consortium partners. This initiative will address our service needs and reduce commissioning costs for these specialist resources.

#### 4.4 Retention of Foster care resources

A review of last year's data showed a loss of 15 foster carers, some due to personal life changes, retirement, or being unsuitable. There is currently a capacity analysis is being undertaken to address the need to increase our recruitment targets through existing resources in order to offset the losses as outlined above and below.

Currently there are 16 fostering households who are not active due to having an agreed 'rest' following a challenging placement, having a recovery period due to illness, moving house or travelling abroad. 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. There are a further 3 carers considering this option. All of these carers will return to fostering at some stage.

There are nine fostering households that are not active due to concerns about standards of care provided to children formerly in placement. This ranges from carer's inappropriate management of behaviour, health and safety in the fostering household, or 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.



#### 4.5 Service Efficiency Review

As part of our business analysis a major review of our service efficiency has been undertaken in order to assure that the service is fit for purpose. The recommendations have been included in our transitional action planning, this includes rebuilding our Framework –i workflows, addressing staff learning needs, improving management oversight and leadership effectiveness.

#### Key targets for improvement

- To provide additional foster placements to meet our target of 48 additional placements by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014
- 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.
- To set up a remand foster placement scheme and parent and child assessment placements (specialist carers) in partnership with NLFC.
- To 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.
- To utilise technology to reach a larger audience for recruitment through the NLAFC i.e. set up Fostering Facebook.
- To urgently complete the review of our service capacity, to ensure that the right resources are in place to undertake the tasks required to increase the targets as outlined above to offset the loss of resources as outlined.
- To implement the changes that have been recommended following our service efficiency review
- To speed up the customer facing processes for improved efficiency in recruitment, assessment and support to our foster carers
- To reduce loss of good carers.

#### 4.6 Overall Service Improvement Planning

A service improvement plan is in place and continues to be developed to address all 31 fostering minimum standards and local performance indicators. A steering group has been set up with members from across the strategic Partnership which includes health, education and performance partners to contribute to planning and improvements to ensure that we are prepared for short notice inspection.