



**Haringey Council**

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee</b>	<b>Item Number:</b>	
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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Fostering Service Annual Report- Update</b>
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<b>Report Authorised by:</b>	<b>Marion Wheeler / Libby Blake</b>
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<b>Lead Officer:</b>	<b>Wendy Tomlinson- Head of Service Commissioning and Placements</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected: All</b>	<b>Report for Key/Non Key Decisions:</b>
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**1. Describe the issue under consideration**

This report provides an update to the report presented to committee in September 2012 and describes recent changes and performance in the Fostering Service.

**2. Cabinet Member introduction**

The Council relies on the Fostering Service to provide sufficient good placements for its Looked After children. This report updates members on progress since the Annual Report. Members will note a number of areas for improvement. I am pleased to recognise the management actions that are being taken to address these.

**3. Recommendations**

This report is for information and consideration by Members.

**4. Other options considered**

N/A



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## **5. Background information**

### **5.1 Restructure of Service**

The Fostering Service, within Commissioning and Placements Service, provides a range of foster placements for children in care. The Fostering Teams assess, train and support task centred foster carers (task centred foster carers are carers recruited by the service to provide foster placements), as well as kinship carers (referred to as 'Connected Persons' in the fostering standards) where children and young people are placed by the local authority within their family or friends network. The activities of the Service are governed by the Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards and are inspected by Ofsted.

The last Ofsted inspection of the service in 2011 judged the service 'satisfactory' with a number of areas highlighted for improvement.

The Fostering Service has been restructured to improve flexibility and efficiency and now comprises two teams. One team will focus on recruitment and assessment and one team will provide intensive support to foster carers.

Assessment staff also undertake children in need assessments for children in private fostering arrangements and assessments of the suitability of their private foster carers.

To improve efficiency Framework-i workflows have been rebuilt. This will modernise the Fostering staff's use of the system and support the production of more accurate management information and performance data.

The restructure was implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012

A service performance review was completed in August 2012 to provide guidance and recommendations for greater efficiency within the restructuring of the fostering service. A range of recommendations were made which have all been implemented in the new service structure. To give just two examples, one recommendation for efficiency related to managing fostering enquires and referrals to the service by having dedicated workers to receive all referrals and enquiries. The new assessment team has two intake social workers who undertake this task. Another recommendation for greater efficiency in the collection of performance data concerned rebuilding our client information system FWi. Phase one of this process has been completed and went live on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Phase two is related to data for foster carers' annual reviews; this has now been rebuilt and testing is underway, with the plan for this to go live by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

An internal audit in late 2012 highlighted areas of the service that required significant improvement. The improvement recommendations are:

- update procedures to address the new structure
- set in place performance indicators
- develop a plan to comply with national fostering standards
- complete annual appraisals for all staff and set targets.



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A management action plan is in place to address the recommendations highlighted by this audit.

Members will also be aware that following continuing concerns about the emerging profile of high cost and satisfactory quality from the Fostering Service it has been agreed that an External 'Best Value' Review will be commissioned to undertake a business analysis and develop a range of options for a service delivery model which will be fit for purpose and meet the needs of the council over the next 5 years. This review is currently out to tender through the council Procurement service and will commence in late spring 2013. [Appendix 1].

## **5.2 Service Performance related to Kinship carers 'Connected Persons' assessments - April 2012 to March 2013**

We have had 65 'kinship' referrals to the service in this period. We have undertaken 15 assessments where for a range of reasons these prospective kinship carers were not suitable and 50 initial assessments were completed. Of these 21 were taken to the fostering panel for approval. A more in depth assessment ruled out 14 - some were unsuitable, some withdrew from the process, for some plans changed. An example of a change of plan might be child returning to the care of their parents or plans for a special guardianship order and the assessment referred to the adoption team. There are 15 kinship carers in the process of being assessed and will be presented to the Fostering Panel and the Family Proceedings Court. There are currently a total of 48 kinship carers being supported within the service.

When considering the placement needs of children the kinship network is always the first consideration, and every effort is made to support the child's family network to care for them having fully assessed any possible risks.

The service performance target for visits is 10 days and approximately 50% meet this performance target. Reasons for poor performance in this area are related to staff shortages as well as cancellations of planned visits. With the new service structure in place and plans to recruit a full complement of staff for the service, it is our intension to improve our performance to achieve a target of 95% within this timescale.

## **5.3 Foster Carer Recruitment and Marketing**

Recruiting sufficient foster carers continues to be a challenge.

The Fostering Network and British Association of Adoption and Fostering produce a range of research studies related to foster care recruitment and continue to report a shortage of foster care resources across the country.

Many fostering agencies continue to struggle to recruit foster carers to meet demand. Fostering Network has produced guidance related to the most successful fostering recruitment:



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- A good marketing strategy and analysis of performance
- Timely response and information to enquirers i.e. good customer service; efficient communication and administration processes
- Good quality support for carers
- Foster carers feeling valued in their role as foster carers

As already outlined our new service structure supports a more timely response to enquirers.

Our marketing strategy is based on the service needs as well as analyses of marketing and campaign methods.

We receive high numbers of enquiries following campaigning events, but these generate a low number of applicants who progress through the recruitment process. This is a similar experience for most agencies. The task is to generate on average 100 enquiries to successfully recruit on average 10 new fostering households.

At recruitment events, there is not much opportunity for staff to talk to interested people in any depth and the leaflets can only provide basic information to generate interest.

Our strategy has been targeted on bringing fostering into each home in the borough through adverts in local press and articles in Haringey People. The poster campaign three times a year regularly raises the profile of fostering across the borough. Through this publicity, we continue to receive registrations of interest in fostering and continue to hold monthly information sessions.

Our service need (gap analysis) undertaken in 2011 indicated a shortage of carers for all age groups, In addition the need to recruit additional, white UK carers, Jewish carers and carers able to care for sibling groups. These needs remain current.

A review and analysis of our marketing campaign undertaken in January 2013 helped us to identify further opportunities for engagement with the local community as one way of increasing our enquiries and applications i.e. further develop links with local community groups such as the religious groups, with a view to regularly sharing information to encourage applications.

We have developed use of on-line resources and social media. The fostering website has been updated and an advert produced featuring our foster carers and staff providing information about fostering for Haringey. A video has been produced through the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium for the recruitment of carers for teenagers. This video has had 406 'hits' on You Tube. We now have a Facebook page for the NLAFC. To date there have been 22 'likes'.

Haringey foster carers themselves also take part in the recruitment process. This contributes to our carers feeling valued as part of the fostering team.



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Between April 2012 and March 2013 there were 228 enquiries about fostering, 126 prospective applicants attended information sessions, during this period, we conducted 60 initial assessment visits. 33 households were invited to progress to preparation training and 28 prospective fostering households completed that training.

Assessing social workers have a role to 'counsel out' unsuitable applicants at the earliest stage of the process. Our intention is that beyond preparation training we will be clear about the likely suitability of each prospective carer and will have few foster carers not progressing through to approval. This year we have seen an increased number of prospective carers fall out in the latter stages of the final assessment for a range of reasons. Of the 28 completing the training we lost 19: seven households withdrew for personal reasons, family illness, unforeseen family commitments, deciding to return to work full time due to financial need, or were not available for assessment at this time due to travelling abroad; three were counselled out as unsuitable, five ended or were counselled out during assessment as they were considered to be suitable in general but had current circumstances which made them unsuitable at the present time i.e. a break up of a marriage resulted in a family member moving into the home into the room that would have been used for a foster child. (These five applicants were encouraged to contact us once their circumstances changed.) While some of these circumstances could not have been foreseen, it is possible that some of these factors could have been identified through an improved initial screening interview and is one of the areas where the service performance needs to be improved.

There were only eight new households approved during the period April 2012 to March 2013. Four assessments are due for presentation at May and June fostering panels and eight assessments are ongoing in the team.

Between April 2012 and Dec 2012, five new task centred carers were approved; three of the assessments took between six and seven months to complete; two assessments took much longer due to change of assessing social worker during the assessment process. Our service target for the completion of assessments is four months from application to presentation at the fostering panel and we are clearly falling short of required performance.

The new service structure implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 means that we now have a team who will focus on assessments', plans for recruitment of permanent workers to fill the vacancies in the service is underway. The service will be in a stronger position to meet the performance targets.

In addition to this, we have continued to de-register more carers than we have are able to recruit, leaving the service with a diminishing number of in house placement resources, consequently rising unit costs, and diminishing value. We have held some vacancies within the service to address some of these rising costs.

In collaboration with our Consortium partners, we are currently in the process of setting up a Remand Fostering Scheme and a Parent and Baby Assessment Scheme. Both these initiatives are intended to reduce commissioning costs for these specialist resources.



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The planned Best Value review will contribute to our planning to address this area of challenge for the service.

### **5.4 Recruitment Targets and performance**

Our three-year target from 2011/12 is to approve 48 carers by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.

Number of approved foster carers 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to March 2012 = 17

Number of approved foster carers 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to March 2013 = 8

Accumulative figure to date = 25

To reach our target over the next period (1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014) we need to approve at least 23 new carers. .

It is likely that the service will not meet the target of 48 on current performance. As outlined throughout this report steps are being taken to address the challenges being presented to enable the service to be as close to this target as is possible.

### **5.5 NLAFC (North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium) placement sharing**

We are now in the second year of our NLAFC agreement to share foster placement resources, as an alternative to commissioning placements through independent fostering agencies. Over the last 12 months, we have secured seven placements for children through the consortium and provided two placements to our consortium partners.

### **5.6 Reduction in the number of children placed in our in house resources**

There has been a continuing reduction in the number of children being placed in our in house foster care provision with a fall from 202 in house placements in April 2012 to 182 in December 2012. Figures for February 2012 show a small increase to 192. The target for the service is to provide in house placement resources for a minimum of 50% of the 530 children needing a foster placements (265 placements). In order to achieve this percentage the service will need to recruit in addition to the figures outlined above a further 80 fostering households (some households will be approved to provide more than one placement).

The service is not in the position at this stage (for the reasons already outlined) to meet this challenge. The planned Best Value review will consider models through which this requirement might be achieved.

There are presently 120 registered task-centred foster care households; 16 are not in current use for a range of reasons. i.e. resting following placements ending, illness, or being re assessed due to concerns about standards of care .



## **5.7 Foster Carers Support**

All foster carers are required to have a named supervising social worker who visits them regularly to monitor the quality of their care of children and young people and provide support. We provide advice and guidance outside of office hours through our fostering out of hours service. The service has had difficulty over the past year in maintaining allocation and minimum standards of visiting, recording and supervisory oversight of all of our carers. This has been a combination of staff shortages, staff turnover, staff sickness and an ineffective management strategy in place to address performance issues.

In order to address these issues, the service review recommendations for improved collection of performance data within the new service structure are now in place (final phase to be live by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013). The service continues to work closely with the FWi support team to produce performance data in a way that is more meaningful for monitoring of the service performance. Some of the performance data now available is relatively new to the service and will take a short while for this to be fully integrated into the daily operation of the service. Once embedded, analysis of data by the fostering management team will further support service improvement.

The updated management and staff appraisals will detail the required performance standards and targets and be routinely measured against performance data now being collected, to address the performance issues as outlined above.

Staffing for the service is being addressed as outlined, in order for the service to maintain supervisory oversight of carers and for compliance with the standards.

## **5.8 Foster Carers Learning and Development**

The Fostering Service learning and development manager takes a lead on all learning and development for our carers. The preparation training group for prospective carers is delivered together with in house foster carers. The care leavers who have supported us to deliver this training have now moved on. One of the tasks outlined in the learning and development strategy for this year is to recruit and train a minimum of three young people to take part in delivering this training.

Other aspects of the learning and development strategy are based on the requirements of the fostering standards, analysis of learning evaluations and outcomes (carers practice) supporting carers to manage more challenging placements.

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

Managing behaviour training a 3 day course = 64 carers



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Inclusive play for children with additional needs = 13

Fostering changes (1 day per week for 12 weeks) = 12

Understanding delegated authority = 28

Online training:

74 of our carers have registered and completed a range of online courses e.g. communicating with children

Safe care and child protection

Understanding child development

There have been 59 certificates awarded for completion.

### **5.9 Foster Carers Support Groups**

The Fostering Service facilitates two support groups each month for our foster carers.

We have also set up a 'Men in Foster Care' group to engage male carers in learning and development to support and increase their confidence to attend training and groups that are in the main female dominated and in addition to recognise their importance as foster carers and male role models and help them to develop relationships and support each other. The group has been running for two years and, after a slow start, it is now well attended.

### **5.10 Review of Foster Carer Allowances**

The Service has undertaken a full review of the allowances and payments scheme for Foster Carers and has consulted with Carers on the proposed changes. Since that consultation, there has in March 2013 been a significant Judicial Review in respect of London Borough of Tower Hamlets concerning the policy of differential fostering allowances paid to Foster carers and relative/ Kinship carers in which the policy has been declared unlawful. This ruling, if upheld will have a significant impact on all local authorities who will be urgently required to review their policies against the ruling. LB Tower Hamlets have a short period in which to launch an appeal against the judgement, we are proposing to hold on the progression of the revised fostering allowances scheme until the Tower Hamlets Judicial Review position is settled.

### **5.11 Overall Service Improvements - Conclusion and Actions**

From the findings of the 2011 Ofsted Inspection, the current analysis of the value, quality and performance and the January 2013 Internal Audit report, the evidence clearly sets out a significant number of areas where the Fostering Service has failed to improve within agreed timescales and is now falling below acceptable standards and should be considered 'at risk'.

In the short term, a management action plan is being put in place using additional resources in order to bring the current performance on support and supervision of foster carers up to at least legal minimum standard. The plan will also address the performance of the recruitment and assessment elements of the service together with the Annual Review and quality assurance strategy.





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An Improvement Board has been set up to manage the improvement plan and will be independently chaired.

As detailed on appendix (1) a fundamental service review will be carried out of the service which will provide recommendations upon which the council can plan for the service delivery model going forward into the next five year period.

## **6. Comments of the Chief Finance Officer and financial implications**

CYPS, in common with other local authorities, provides a fostering service to ensure a good supply of in-house foster carers to meet the needs of children who are looked after. In-house foster care is a more cost-effective option than external, independent foster care at a planned unit cost of £42 per bed night compared to £111 per bed night. This differential does not take account of the staffing cost of the fostering service.

If the service continues to fail to recruit in-house foster carers, children will need to be placed with more expensive external, independent foster carers. This would impact on the ability of CYPS to meet challenging savings targets (£3.3m 2013-14) which are reliant on reducing both the numbers and unit costs of placements for children in care.

Failure of the fostering service to recruit in-house foster carers represents a significant risk to the achievement of CYPS objectives.

## **7. Head of Legal Services and legal implications**

The report is in accordance with NMS 25.7 which requires the 'executive side of the local authority' to receive a written report every 3 months on the "management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service".

Paragraph 5.10 of the report refers to fostering allowances and the Tower Hamlets case of March 2013. The paragraph states that you propose to "hold on the progression of the revised fostering allowances scheme" until the Tower Hamlets judicial review position is resolved.

In that case the High Court declared the fostering policies of Tower Hamlets to be unlawful **"to the extent that they discriminate on the grounds of pre-existing relationship with the child between family and unrelated foster carers" in the payment of the fostering fee.**

At paragraph 116 of the judgment, the court gave Tower Hamlets a period of 3 months to reconsider its policies in view of the declaration that they are unlawful. The court said that if no new policies had been issued within three months, then a further application could be made to the court.



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In these circumstances, it would be sensible to review the current and proposed Haringey policies to ensure they are lawful and/or that they are brought within the legal requirements.

**8. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments**

**9. Head of Procurement Comments**

**10. Policy Implication**

**11. Use of Appendices**

Fundamental service review of the LB Haringey's in-house Fostering Service

**12. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol IV FOSTERING

<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00023-2011>

[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/581/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/581/contents/made) Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00029-2011> Fostering Services National Minimum Standards



## **Commissioning of an Independent external review of fostering services (Iain Low)**

### **Fundamental service review of the LB Haringey's in-house Fostering Service**

#### **1. Background**

The Haringey Fostering Service is run in accordance with the National Minimum Standards which are underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Care Standards Act 2000. Statutory Guidance for fostering services – Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review sets out the wider context for local authorities as providers and commissioners of fostering services. It also strives to follow the best practice guidance outlined in the UK National Standards for Foster Care and Code of Practice (1999).

The latest inspection was carried out in January 2011, by OfSTED and the overall quality rating was satisfactory

The service is currently experiencing:

- A reduction in the number of in-house carers
- A higher cost than statistical neighbours for in-house carers
- A higher cost than statistical neighbours for external IFA placements

The Haringey Fostering service wants to be instrumental in improving the outcomes for our looked after children and young people. The service wants to improve the pool of in-house foster carers and the support they offer them, improve service provision and front line practice and support permanency planning.

The continuing challenge for the fostering service is the recruitment and retention of good quality foster carers to improve placement provision by improving placement matching, placement stability and increasing placement choice.

A fundamental service review of the Fostering Service will be carried out, including comparator service costs, testing the quality and efficiency of the offer, and challenging against other models of delivery.

#### **2. The Review**

A specification document has been agreed that details the objectives and outcomes of the review and this has been loaded onto ESPO (ESPO is a framework that offers a range of consultancy areas specific to local government and the wider public sector, including adult and children social care).

Through this framework, organisations can submit responses and quotes to carry out the review. A selection panel will meet week beginning the 15<sup>th</sup> April 2013 to assess the



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submissions by agreed criteria based on quality and cost, the successful organisation will be advised the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2013 with a start date of late May 2013 with a reporting date of August / September 2013.

As part of the review the successful organisation will meet with a wide range of stakeholders, including young people, foster carers, the Lead Member for Children's Services, Members and the Director of Children's Services.