



<b>Report for:</b>	Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2014	<b>Item Number:</b>	
<b>Title:</b>	Update on the work to recruit an external provider to recruit and increase the number of internal foster carers, along with information for noting about the LAC sufficiency strategy		
<b>Report Authorised by:</b>	Lisa Redfern Director, Children's Services (Acting)		
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Paul McCarthy, Interim Head of Service (Commissioning and Placements)		
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b> All	<b>Report for:</b> Non-key decision		

**1. Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the work to recruit an external provider to recruit and increase the number of internal foster carers. As requested by committee. This report also includes information for noting about the Looked After Children (LAC) sufficiency strategy.
- 1.2 There has been much progress over the past nine months. There has been extensive consultation with Haringey foster carers to better understand their motivations and needs. We have looked at alternative ways of delivering the service, leading to the decision to outsource the recruitment and assessment of new foster carers and to focus our in house staff on delivering an improved support offer to approved foster carers.
- 1.3 The new Placements Sufficiency Strategy highlights a number of successes over recent years, including a safe and persistent reduction in the number of looked after children, a positive move from residential to family placements, improving placement stability and a strong level cost control. It also points to further opportunities for improvement and savings and sets out what more can be done to realise them. The fostering project is now focused on delivering these further changes.



**2. Cabinet Member introduction**

I fully support the project activity and forward plans and feel this will significantly move the fostering work forward with improved outcomes for children and young people.

**3. Recommendations**

3.1 The Fostering Service Review (May to August 2013) recommended that:

- a refreshed Placements Needs Analysis and Sufficiency Strategy be completed;
- the in-house fostering recruitment and assessment function be externalised at pace; and
- plans be formulated for the continuous improvement of the in-house fostering service.

3.2 The Fostering Implementation Project was put in place in October 2013 to deliver these recommendations. This project concluded on 31 January 2014 and made further proposals to support the growth and success of the in-house fostering service. Specifically, the creation of a 'Continuous Improvement Plan' ('CIP') was agreed which will bring the staff teams together with Haringey foster carers to re-design the service and jointly implement the changes needed. This work will respond directly to the 'customer insight' from local foster carers in the Fostering Service Review, including points of direct feedback, and will run until March 2015.

3.3 It is an important feature of the work that it is designed and delivered jointly through the staff teams and foster carers (to maximise engagement and ownership and improve relationships). There is capacity to carry out this work although a requirement for change management resource has been identified and this has been sourced through the Strategic Partnership. Additional detail as to this work is set out in Section 5.

**4. Alternative options considered**

In addition to the externalisation of the recruitment and assessment function – the option recommended and approved - a range of alternative options were considered and appraised regarding the future delivery model for the in-house fostering service. These are set out in previous reports to this committee and to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

**5. Background information**

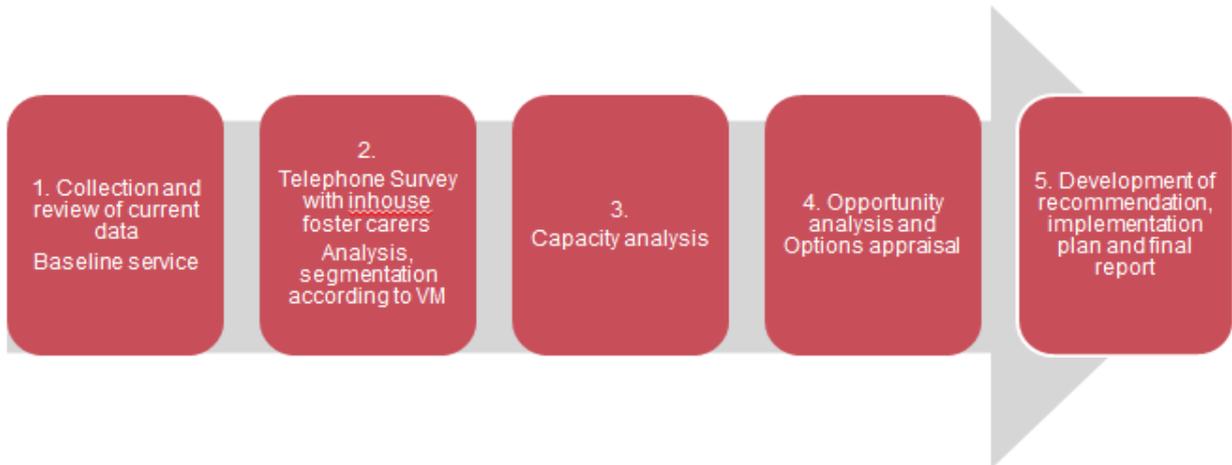
5.1 The Council is committed to maximising the number of local family placements available to Haringey's looked after children to deliver improved outcomes and to offer value for money. In support of this, the Council engaged iMPower in May 2013 to carry out a review of the in-house fostering service, encompassing both in-house improvement opportunities and alternative delivery options.

This work confirmed that the service has a low, and reducing, level of local fostering placements and that an immediate strategic and tactical response was required.



## 5.2 Work carried out

### 5.2.1 Fostering Service Review (May to August 2013)



In addition to identifying and appraising options for how the in-house service could be delivered in the future, the Fostering Review also conducted in-depth engagement work – through telephone surveys and focus groups - to enable a better understanding of the needs of foster carers and prospective foster carers. This work canvassed direct feedback on service experience and also applied a psychographic system called ‘Values Modes’ to understand the values and motivations of foster carers. This work revealed a common values set amongst foster carers – a finding since validated by national Department for Education (DfE) research – which can be used to target service development, as well as specific and immediate improvement opportunities.

### 5.2.2 Fostering Implementation Project (October 2013 to January 2014)

The Fostering Implementation Project was subsequently commissioned through iMPower to advance the recommendations of the Review. This work concluded on 31 January 2014 and delivered the following:

- (a) Placements Sufficiency Strategy, including Needs Analysis
- (b) New model for assessment and recruitment of foster carers
- (c) Service performance framework, and
- (d) Continuous Improvement Plan (including pledges from staff and foster carers).

#### (a) **Placements Sufficiency Strategy**

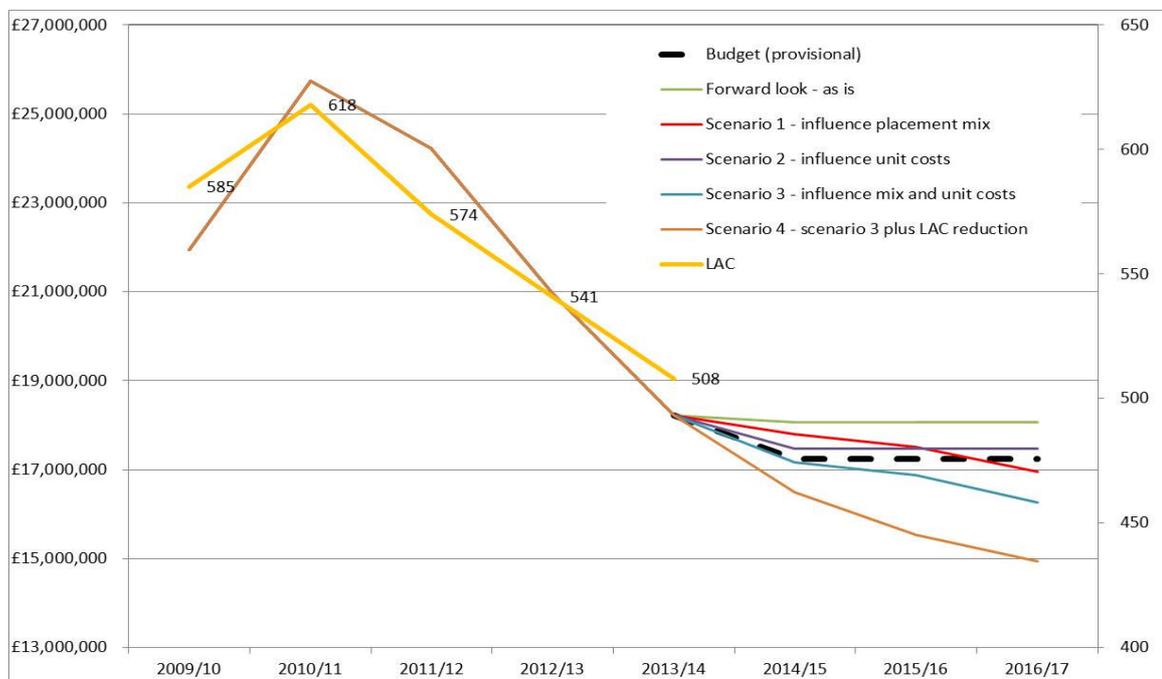
A new Sufficiency Strategy has been developed which sets out the ambition, direction and required actions for placements sufficiency. This includes:



- Investment in the growth and development of the in-house fostering service to provide greater local family placement sufficiency (across all CYP cohorts);
- Transition from 32% in-house fostering placement share to 60% over three years;
- Specific foster carer recruitment targets based around the needs of looked after children;
- Development of a clear specialist foster care offer and foster carer development pathway;
- A general rationalisation of commissioning routes and reinforcement of practice; and
- More active market management, particularly in relation to local residential provision.

The Sufficiency Strategy was co-produced with Finance in order to ensure the financial context is clear, accurate and understood. To this end the document examines a number of impact scenarios (set out in the graph below) in which the effect of changes in the different ‘cost drivers’, unit costs, mix of placement types and LAC numbers can be seen.

In order to achieve short term sustainability, both unit costs and the placement mix must be influenced at pace. A continued reduction in LAC numbers will add further comfort over both the short and long term.





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**(b) Progress in implementing the new model for recruitment of foster carers**

The new model for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers has now been commissioned and implemented. NRS Limited was appointed following a process of market engagement and a formal tendering exercise which was co-ordinated by the Procurement Team. A number of organisations were approached and invited to submit bids under the Council's "Request to Quote" procurement process. The decision to award the contract to NRS Limited was based on an analysis of the organisation's track record in this specialist area, our confidence in their ability to provide consistently high quality, and also value for money considerations.

A formal contract with NRS is at present being finalised and we expect to have it authorised by Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March.

Following formal contract sign off, NRS Limited will be leading on the recruitment of new foster carers, including the production of publicity materials and the placement of advertisements in a range of media. The Council's Communications Team will have oversight and final approval of all advertising and publicity materials.

We will be increasing the number and accessibility of Fostering Information sessions for the public. These will be delivered by our professional fostering staff and NRS staff.

During the period March 2014 to May 2014, leading up to Fostering Fortnight, we will be aiming to raise the profile of fostering in the borough. Our aim is to get the message out that Haringey is engaged in a drive to recruit many new foster carers so that we can better ensure that our looked after children and young people stay in or close to their home community, to their schools and to their families.

Within the terms of our contract with NRS Limited, any new prospective foster carers can be assured of a prompt, friendly, welcoming and professional response to their initial enquiry. This will be followed up by a telephone screening interview, then by a home visit at a time convenient to the prospective foster carer. Fostering assessments will be completed by a qualified social worker within 16 weeks, barring exceptional circumstances, during which time carers will receive three days of preparatory training. Before an assessment is presented to our Fostering Panel, there will be a second opinion visit to the foster carer by a Haringey fostering manager.

NRS Limited have a substantial pool of self employed qualified social workers, most of whom have many years of social work experience. NRS Limited provide professional supervision to the independent social workers. NRS Limited ensure that all their associates have up to date DBS checks and



suitable references. Each of the independent social workers carrying out the assessments has a contract with NRS Limited. There is no possibility of these social workers ever being deemed employees of Haringey Council or acquiring employment rights.

NRS Limited has over twenty years experience in recruiting and placing temporary social care staff. In the past five years they have diversified into the provision of independent social worker assessments, supervised contact services and assessment of foster carers. NRS Limited are already delivering the fostering recruitment and assessment services for the London Boroughs of Lewisham, Southwark and Hackney. In Lewisham, NRS Limited have successfully recruited 100 new fostering households in a period of 20 months.

Our target is to recruit 45 new fostering households by the end of March 2015. NRS Limited will be paid on a "payment by results" basis, in other words, they will receive an agreed payment for each completed assessment delivered to the Fostering Panel, subject to the work meeting the agreed quality standards.

(c) **Service Performance Framework**

Provider performance, in terms of the number and quality of foster carer assessments delivered and the forward 'pipeline' of applicants, will be monitored through a new 'service performance framework'. This framework spans the entire fostering service, including support, supervision, utilisation and retention of foster carers and will be operated through the new Continuous Improvement Plan Project Board (see below).

(d) **Continuous Improvement Plan ('CIP')**

The CIP, which is based on and responds directly to what foster carers recently told us, puts foster carers at the heart of the service. Engagement work tells us that:

- approved foster carers have very mixed experiences of the service and there are opportunities to make them feel more valued;
- foster carers want to be involved in the fostering service, and this involvement shouldn't start or end with the placement;
- equally, prospective foster carers would value greater and earlier contact with approved foster carers, highlighting the power of 'peer advocacy' through word-of-mouth referral campaigns ;
- foster carers are already active in and have a deep reach into our communities and are willing to help, along with the Council's partners, generate word-of-mouth opportunities, and



- this principle also applies to support and the Council has an opportunity to help build a community of mutual support in which foster carers have a greater stake.

The plan comprises four elements (project 'workstreams') and will be delivered over 12 months starting in February 2014:

1. Recruitment and assessment (complementing the work of the external recruitment provider)
2. Support
3. Utilisation
4. Specialist Offer

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

- 6.1 The latest 2013-14 budget for fostering placements is £16.84m comprising £13.821m (82%) independent fostering and £3.019m (18%) in-house. Assuming the numbers of LAC in foster placements and unit costs remain constant, implementation of the transition to 60% in-house foster care would save £3.8m over the 3 year period. Rationalisation of commissioning routes is expected to reduce unit costs from their current levels.
- 6.2 Implementation of the proposed sufficiency strategy, through changing the placement mix and reducing unit costs, is expected to deliver £2.25m savings in order to contribute to the CYPS savings target in 2014-15.
- 6.3 Further analysis will be required to clarify the level of future savings to be delivered through the sufficiency strategy which will be required to contribute to further, challenging MTFP targets from 2015-16 onwards.

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

n/a

## **8 Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments**

n/a

## **9 Head of Procurement Comments**

- 9.1 The External Recruitment Provider was commissioned with the advice and guidance of Procurement and is fully compliant with the Procurement Code of Practice.
- 9.2 A competitive process was undertaken to ensure Value for Money was achieved.



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9.3 Contract management arrangements for the external recruitment provider are in place, ensuring KPI's are met and allowing early identification of any non-compliance.

### **10 Policy Implication**

10.1 The work carried out with regard to fostering supports the Council's wider commitment to accommodating children in family settings, where possible locally, as set out in a number of policies. Those which underpin the Council's approach to the accommodation of children becoming looked after specifically are:

- Placements and Permanency Policy (published 2013), and
- Family and Friends Policy (published 2013).

10.2 The Placements Sufficiency Strategy and project activities do not propose to revise these policies but to strengthen their effective delivery whilst securing best value for money.