

Report for: Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee, 4th July 2016

Item number:

Title: Updating report on Haringey Recruitment of In house foster carers



Report authorised by : Jon Abbey
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Ward(s) affected: N/A

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Non-Key

1. Describe the issue under consideration

To update Members on progress to recruit a provider to undertake training and recruitment of in-house foster carers

2. Introduction

The recruitment and assessment function for in-house foster care has been commissioned through a contract with an external provider, NRS, for the last two years. Prior to the expiry of the contract, an options appraisal was undertaken to consider the preferred delivery model for in-house foster care recruitment and assessment. This proposed that the service continue to be commissioned externally and a procurement exercise was undertaken to seek a provider to deliver this contract over the next period.

No provider came forward to bid for this work.

Given the critical nature of foster care, this briefing note sets out the options currently being pursued to ensure in-house foster carers continue to be recruited for Haringey.

**3. Recommendations
Proposed approach**

The proposed approach is as follows:

- 3.1 Ascertain in detail from the potential bidders approached why they did not bid and what would need to change for them to put in a bid were we to decide to go back to the market for this service. This work will be completed by 23rd June when we will take a decision as to whether returning to the market is likely to generate interest and with what changes to the model, specification or pricing.
- 3.2 If there is little interest from the market we will agree on 23rd June to restart negotiations with the previous provider – NRS – about them continuing to deliver the service. As we have been to market without a bid, this course would now be open to us. It is worth noting that there have, however, been a number of performance issues with the current contract which would need to be resolved before agreeing to set in place a new contract with this provider. These negotiations will be led by Commissioning.
- 3.3. Alongside the above, we will actively seek to build collaborative relationships with neighbouring boroughs to develop a shared service model across borough boundaries for the provision of foster care. There has been little interest to date in this proposal, given the pressures all authorities are facing in this field, but equally different approaches do need to be pursued to respond to the severe shortage of people willing and able to come forward as foster carers. This will not deliver a pipeline of potential foster carers in the short to medium term.
- 3.4 We have been sketching out proposals to use a micro-enterprise model to support people to become foster carers. We know that recruitment through word of mouth and from within communities is most likely to result in potential foster carers being identified. This approach would work at a community level to raise awareness of fostering, to promote its benefits for foster carers, to support people to set up as foster carers and to build a pipeline for the future. We would accelerate this work and move to commission an external provider to deliver this model. If successful, however, it would not deliver a pipeline of potential foster carers in the short term.
- 3.5 Return to proposals to develop an in-house service. This was not the preferred option when the appraisal was carried out earlier this year, given capacity issues within the service and the fact that there are significant fixed costs in establishing a new team with no guarantee of foster care recruitment.
- 3.6 Work is already in progress to revisit and improve the model of supervision support provided to foster carers by the in-house team. This is critical to ensuring that foster carers are attracted to work for Haringey and feel a valued part of the network of provision for Looked After Children in the borough. This includes work to:
- revise the Foster Care Partnership Agreement
 - review allowances and payments to foster carers
 - systematise the arrangements for matching foster carers to children and young people
 - refresh the supervision and support offer.
 - develop a marketing and recruitment strategy in partnership with a provider that is driven by the Council rather than the provider.

4. Reasons for the recommendations

- 4.1 Having a cohort of in-house foster carers is a cost effective way of meeting the Sufficiency Duty as set out in 2010 statutory guidance for securing sufficient local accommodation for looked after children.
- 4.2 The proposed approach set out here is aimed at addressing both the immediate issue of getting in place a service to deliver a stream of approved Haringey foster carers and the long term aim of building a more sustainable model of recruitment, training and assessment.

5. Background information

- 5.1 In-house foster carers are a critical element of our provision for looked after children. alongside Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) which largely provide more specialist foster care to children with more complex needs, In-house foster care enables children and young people to be accommodated in family settings, often locally, and to develop significant relationships with their foster carer whether their period in care is over a short or long period.
- 5.2 There is a significant cost differential between in-house and externally recruited foster carers although there are a number of built-in costs to in-house foster care as the supervision and support is provided by social workers from the Council.
- 5.3 There is a regional and national shortage of foster carers and the difficulty in recruiting suitable potential foster carers faced by NRS in delivering the previous contract is shared by many other local authorities, particularly in dense urban areas. Whilst the pipeline for foster carers being recruited has been slow, we have still performed above the average amongst our statistical neighbours.

6. Contribution to Strategic Outcomes

Priority 1 - Enable every child and young person to have the best start in life, with high quality education.

7. Statutory Officer Comments

Procurement have been involved in this issue.

It is important to secure good quality foster placements, preferably locally, to enhance the life chances of children in care.

8. Use of Appendices

NA

9. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children: Statutory Guidance 2010

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/securing-sufficient-accommodation-for-looked-after-children>

Ref. ref: DCSF-00186-2010

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