

**MEETING TITLE AND DATE:**Cabinet - 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015**REPORT OF:** Andrew FraserDirector of Schools and Children's  
Services

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<b>Agenda – Part 1</b>	<b>Item: 10</b>
<b>Subject: Fostering Services In Enfield</b>	
Wards: All	
<b>Cabinet Member consulted: Cllr Orhan</b>	

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The report updates Cabinet on the performance of the fostering service since April 2014
- Enfield has 122 fostering households providing placements for 163 Looked After Children.
- There have been 14 new foster care approvals in 2014/15 a net increase of 18% on 13/14.
- A further 9 assessments are booked into fostering panels between March and the end of June 2015
- Placement stability has improved with a significant decrease in the numbers of LAC requiring three or more moves.
- Take up of training by foster carers has increased by 20% on the previous year.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Cabinet notes the findings of this report and, agrees that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet receive an annual report on the performance of the Fostering service.

### **3. BACKGROUND 2014 -15**

#### **3.1 Numbers**

Currently Enfield Council has 122 fostering households, of these, 14 are approved family and friends carers who are fostering children from within their own networks. In addition there are 4 temporarily approved family and friends foster carers with children already in place through court proceedings but who are undergoing the full fostering assessment. Enfield Council is providing placements for 163 children (66% of all foster placements) with only two vacancies. In common with all local authorities Enfield loses a number of foster carers each year and since April 2014, 19 foster families have been de-registered. Six of these were as a result of children in specific family and friends placements reaching the age of 18 and their carers not wishing to become mainstream foster carers; 5 stopped fostering when they became a permanent guardian of their previous foster child through obtaining an adoption or special guardianship order. Four foster families resigned due to changes in their own circumstances i.e. returning to full-time employment and 4 were de registered due to standard of care issues.

#### **3.2 Recruitment**

A successful restructuring of the fostering team took place in 2014 and this has increased capacity and improved productivity. In the year 2013/14 there were 11 fostering household approvals. Since April 2014 there have been 14 fostering approvals and two Family and Friends approvals. Between March and June 2015 there are a further 9 fostering households booked into the fostering panel for approval. The 2014/15 approval figure represents a net increase of 18% compared to an 11% increase in approvals for the year 2013/14.

Of those mainstream carers currently being assessed, 12 are willing to consider teenagers. This is a tangible result of the targeted recruitment strategy, part of which was developed in response to the identified gap in foster carers willing to care for adolescents – a growing problem given the increase in the number of teenage looked after children. Carers due to attend the panel are from a range of BME background to more closely match the needs of the Council's looked after children population. A number of recruitment events over the past year were designed to build closer relationships with local faith and community groups to encourage people from a wider range of backgrounds to apply to foster. These included events held at the Edmonton mosque and with the Enfield Albanian community.

The recruitment strategy for 2015/16 aims to approve 20 new mainstream foster families. In addition to local marketing activity, recruitment of foster carers will be further supported through our involvement with the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium. This joint initiative enables the six constituent local authorities to join together to purchase more expensive advertising options, for example using national newspapers and underground advertising. In conjunction with the Consortium, the Service has developed a parent and child assessment scheme which provides six placements for parents and their babies in a foster family while decisions about permanence are being made. Input from the specialist foster carers informs the full social work assessment of parenting capacity and is an important part of the evidence submitted to court.

In addition to its other duties, the fostering service undertakes assessments of applicants wishing to become the legal Special Guardians of named children. Since April 2014 33 such assessments have been completed.

### **3.3 Support and development**

All foster carers have a named supervising social worker who provides regular supervision and supports the carer's professional development. A very comprehensive training programme is available for all carers and this has been designed to offer the flexibility to meet the needs of the foster carer workforce. In addition to day time taught courses, learning opportunities are also available on weekends and evenings as well as on line.

In the last twelve months there has been a significant increase in the uptake of training ensuring that 86% of all foster carers have undertaken some training.

Placements which are vulnerable to the risk of breakdown are closely monitored by supervising social workers and managers.

Placement stability meetings take place to agree the additional support required to prevent children experiencing unnecessary moves. 'Instep' is a CAMHS led placement support service that provides speedy and responsive solutions to fragile placements. A programme of small focus groups for foster carers has been developed and these are facilitated by a CAMHS child psychotherapist. The aim of these groups is to reduce placement breakdowns by helping carers to consider the likely challenges in caring for more complex children and to develop strategies for managing these successfully. Such initiatives have contributed to a significant improvement in placement stability of looked after children. In April 2014 12.3% of looked after children experienced 3 or more moves in a rolling year. This had reduced to 8.8% by December 2014, an improvement singled out for commendation by Ofsted in the recent inspection of Council services for vulnerable children.

### **3.4 Ofsted**

Council services for vulnerable children were inspected by Ofsted during January and February 2015. The provisional judgement for services to looked after children is "good". Although the fostering service was not subject to a full inspection, the inspectors did comment that they had received a favourable impression of its work.

### **3.5 Staffing and accommodation**

The fostering service is based at Triangle House and is staffed with experienced practitioners and managers. The co-location with the social work teams for looked after children and care leavers is very helpful in joint working and the sharing of expertise. The Fostering Manager oversees the Fostering Service and sits on the Fostering Panel as the Professional Advisor. The Head of Looked After Children's Services is, in addition to the Assistant Director of SCS, the Agency Decision Maker and finalises a decision based on the recommendation of a Review as well as deciding on changes of foster carer approvals.

### **3.6 Support to the Fostering Service**

The Fostering Service has started to utilise the services offered by the HEART child psychotherapist who attends staff meetings to analyse some of the complexities that exist within placements. This is seen as a positive and reflective opportunity by the staff who engage well with the service.

### **3.7 Recent developments**

The last twelve months has seen foster carers taking a far more active role in the recruitment of new carers. They have been closely involved in the running of coffee mornings, borough wide events and consortium activities and contributing to the Skills to Foster training, undertaken by all new applicants.

Feedback from newly recruited carers has highlighted that experienced carers are very successful at promoting the service, answering questions and describing the realities of the fostering role.

Staying Put is the national framework under which looked after children can remain in their foster placements beyond the age of 18. While Enfield has had a Staying Put policy for a number of years, recent legislation enshrined the rights of far more young people to benefit from such arrangements. In response, a very comprehensive suite of documents has been developed which includes detailed information for carers and young people and which will make care planning far more streamlined.

### **3.8 Consultation with Carers and Children**

There have been 4 carer consultations in the last 18 months. These have focussed on service development, foster carer lifestyles and the development of the new finance and Staying Put policies.

Members of KRATOS, the children in care council, influence service development and delivery. They take an active role in the development and training of all staff on Development Days, sit on recruitment panels and have co-produced our new health passport, designed to ensure that our looked after children leave care with their full health history. Members of KRATOS have also been involved in the development of the fostering smoking policy and in developing templates for foster carer profiles. A number of care leavers are now involved in delivering Skills to Foster training.

### **3.9 Fostering Panel**

The Fostering Panel meets every three weeks although additional panels are convened if required. The panel is chaired by an Independent fostering specialist. Panel membership is made up of a panel advisor who is also the manager of the fostering service; representatives from Children's Services; two elected Members plus lay members who have experience of fostering or working with children. All members are checked with the Disclosure and Barring Service.

There is a training programme for panel members to ensure they remain up to date with changes in child care law and practice.

The Fostering Panel is a statutory body and has a number of responsibilities:

1. To approve applications from prospective foster carers for a range of tasks
2. To approve applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for children already or about to be placed with them
3. To agree extra time for Connected Persons cases where an additional 8 week extension to temporary approval is requested in order for assessments to be completed
4. To carry out first annual reviews of foster carers and other reviews which discuss continuation of approval, extension of approval or standards of care issues
5. To agree de-registration of carers
6. To quality assure work presented

#### **4. The North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium**

The consortium develops an annual action plan which involves the 6 boroughs, Enfield, Barnet, Camden, Hackney, Haringey and Islington who work together sharing training, recruitment activities and fostering placements for children. It meets regularly at both a strategic Heads of Service level as well as an operational level.

This year has seen the development of initiatives such as recruitment events within different faith groups such as the Muslim community held at Edmonton mosque. It has also seen foster carers attending cross Borough preparation training prior to becoming foster carers. It has also seen Enfield host and facilitate the support group for the Consortium Parent and Child foster scheme.

##### **4.1 Future Developments**

1. To develop Teenage Fostering Schemes in each borough and include a wrap around scheme for the proposed residential developments.
2. To develop a Consortium Out of Hours Foster Carer Support Scheme and consider possibilities for out of hours placements.

#### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

This report is for information.

#### **6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ensure that Cabinet members are updated on the work of the fostering service.

#### **7. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, RESOURCES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS**

##### **7.1 Financial Implications**

The Fostering Service budget and projected outturn for 2014/15 is shown in the table below:-

	2014/15 Budget	Projected 2014/15 Outturn
	£'000s	£'000s
Employee Costs	1,018	1,116
Foster Allowances	2,242	2,279
Other Fostering Costs	78	50
Net Controllable Expenditure	3,338	3,445

The service is projected to report an overspend of £107k in 2014/15 mainly as a result of additional staffing costs to complete assessments and cover for a long term staff sickness.

The service is also a member of the CIPFA Looked After Children's Benchmarking group. The latest statistics show that our average unit costs (£603 per week) for a child placement are slightly higher than the London average (£532 per week). However we do place more children in our own in-house service (53%) compared to the London average (48%) which will be a contributory factor to the higher unit cost.

## **7.2 Legal Implications**

The requirements for a fostering service are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the matters set out in this report comply with these requirements.

## **7.3 Property Implications**

Not applicable.

## **8. KEY RISKS**

Any operational risks are minimised by attention to good practice in recruiting and preparing foster carers, good preparation for children, attention to detail during the introduction process and while children continue in placement.

## **9. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

### **9.1 Fairness for All**

The fostering service provides homes for vulnerable children, keeps them safe from harm and allows them to benefit from a family life.

### **9.2 Growth and Sustainability**

The work of the North London Adoption and Fostering consortium delivers cost effective partnership working initiatives.

### **9.3 Strong Communities**

Foster carers are members of the community who provide a valuable service on behalf of vulnerable children in Enfield.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT IMPLICATIONS**

Targeted recruitment strategies ensure we have a range of carers that can meet the needs of the complex and diverse range of children in our community.

**11. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The Fostering Service is governed by the National Minimum Standards 2011. Compliance is scrutinised by the Fostering Panel and any performance related issues arising are managed by the Service.

**12. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

The Council Health and Safety Unit comprises of four teams who provide a wide range of advice, guidance and assistance on matters of Asbestos Management, Fire Safety and Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare across the Council. The Looked After Children Service has an individual Health and Safety Procedure in place which all staff members have been sent. It is the responsibility of the Management Group to ensure that staff members adhere to the procedure as and when issues relating health and safety arise.

**13. HR IMPLICATIONS**

Enfield Council is committed to applying equalities when recruiting and is proud of a staff group that is represented of its community and the customer they serve. The Council has a number of Policies in place so that all staff members are aware of their rights and the expectations required of them in carrying out their duties. Any misconduct and performance issues are dealt with robustly and all Council employees are required to work within the remits of the Dignity at Work Principles and the Employee Code of Conduct.

**14. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

The increase in recruitment of local foster carers to Enfield will ensure the placement of children from the locality in the locality. This will help in the building of stronger communities and social cohesion. Children will be better able to access the excellent range of services provided within the Borough

**Background Papers**

None.