

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015/2016 REPORT

MEETING TITLE AND DATE:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
January 17th 2017

REPORT OF:

Director of Schools & Children's Services

Contact officers and telephone numbers:

Linda Hughes 020 8379 8222

E-mail: Linda.Hughes@enfield.gov.uk

Debbie Michael 020 8379 8480

E-mail: Debbie.Michael@enfield.gov.uk

Agenda - Part:	Item: Update Report
Subject: Fostering & Adoption Services in Enfield	
Wards: All	
Cabinet Member consulted: Cllr Orhan	

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report updates the Scrutiny Panel on the work of the Fostering & Adoption Services since April 2015. It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards that Members receive regular reports on the work of the Fostering & Adoption Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the scrutiny Panel notes the findings of this report.

FOSTERING

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Foster Carers

During 2015-16:

In 2015/16 Enfield recruited 17 mainstream foster carers, the second highest number in the consortium. It should be noted that while Haringey recruited 20, their feedback is that these carers were secured by an independent recruitment agency on their behalf and are almost all baby carers, many of whom live a long way from the borough. Both Haringey and Hackney have piloted outsourcing the recruitment of foster carers and both experienced significant problems and have quickly brought the service back in house.

Haringey	Islington	Camden	Hackney	Enfield	Barnet
20	9	12	13	15	13

In 2016/17 Enfield has approved 8 carers to date and has another 7 in assessment, 3 are due to start the assessment process, 2 are on hold and likely to progress to assessment stage and 7 are in the process of meeting with social workers following their attendance to the Skills to Foster training. The next Skills to Foster Course is scheduled for December 2016 with 3 potential applicants on the list to attend so far. If any of our applicants are ready to attend the Course before December, they will be booked onto a consortium borough's training course to avoid delay in starting their assessment.

These are higher numbers than any other consortium borough. In 2015/16 the average time to recruit a foster carer in Enfield was 5.7 months. For the 8 carers recruited to date in 2016/17 the average time was 7.6 months. The reason for the increase is largely due to the time it is taking for DBS checks to be received. Two of the applications also required police checks to be undertaken in Spain and in Germany. The timescale is measured from the time between the carer putting in their formal application to being approved by the fostering panel. The regulations allow prospective carers to put in a formal application at any time from their initial expression of interest until after the Skills to Foster course. Every effort is made to encourage interested applicants to apply formally as early as possible in the process as this then allows checks to be requested and reduces the timescale to approval.

3.2 Recruitment

While our recruitment strategies are delivering positive results, these are offset by the number of carers resigning each year. In 2015/16, 15 foster carers left the service. In 2016/17, 13 sets of foster carers have already been de registered: Of these carers a number have adopted the child they were fostering and had no space for another LAC while others have resigned after long service as carers or due to changes in their family circumstances.

It is clear that the key to increasing the pool of available carers depends on both a successful recruitment campaign and reducing the number of carers leaving the service wherever possible.

All foster carers who wish to resign are offered exit interviews and where appropriate, offers of support are made to strongly encourage them to remain with the service. These include career breaks and conversion to an alternative fostering category e.g. respite. As can be seen from the analysis above, there is usually an unavoidable reason for de registration.

3.3 Placements

We currently have 131 Enfield fostering households and 8 children placed in consortium foster placements. We have 110 mainstream fostering households, currently providing homes for 146 of our looked after children. Vacancies in 20 of these fostering households are currently 'unavailable' for a variety of reasons. These include the carer/s being on holiday, subject to Standards of Care investigations, ill or about to retire. A number of single vacancies are blocked in households approved for 2 children because the 1 child in placement is very challenging or unable to live with other children.

We have an additional 11 sets of approved family and friends' foster carers and 10 temporary family and friends foster carers, under a specific regulation which allows children to be placed while a further assessment is underway. Fostering is a very highly regulated service area and all 131 sets of carers must have an allocated qualified social worker to support them, provide regular supervision and prepare a comprehensive annual review.

3.4 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 and development 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.

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.

3.5 Fostering Service Planned Actions October 2016 – March 2017

- Foster carer recruitment is now the priority for the North London consortium and a number of joint recruitment events are planned.

- The consortium Marketing and Recruitment group is currently completing an analysis of which strategies have produced the best outcomes to inform future planning.
- A strong partnership has been forged with the Imams and a previous event there to recruit BME adopters attracted over 100 interested people. A fostering recruitment event was held at the Regents Park Mosque on 08/10/16 resulting in interest from many people; currently two leads are being followed up and it is looking likely they will be progressing through the process to be assessed.
- Another event, also on 08/10/16, was held at the Dugdale Centre as part of Black History Month to raise awareness and the profile of fostering in Enfield.
- IFA carers looking after Enfield children are being targeted to encourage them to work for the Council.
- We have recruited a dynamic marketing and recruitment officer who is keen to improve and modernise our on line presence.
- The increase in temporarily approved and family and friends foster carers makes allocation challenging as caseloads increase – workflow within the service is kept under constant review and streamlined wherever possible to ensure that capacity is maximised and focused on the statutory requirements.

ADOPTION

3.6 BACKGROUND

3.7 Children

During 2015-16:

Enfield obtained 15 Adoption Orders, the third highest number in the North London Consortium.

Hackney	Camden	Haringey	Barnet	Enfield	Islington
16	7	24	12	15	12

Across the consortium, there was a 12% reduction in adoptions from the previous year. This reflects changing judicial practice which has led to a significant reduction in the number of Placement Orders made by the courts, in favour of Special Guardianship Orders which keep the child in their family of origin. In 2016/17 Enfield has secured 5 adoption orders to date with another 8 anticipated before the end of the financial year, barring parental appeals.

There has been a significant increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted this year with 16 already having been awarded on children who were previously looked after and another 4 on children who had not been in care prior to the order being granted. This compares with a total of 11 Special Guardianship Orders in the whole of 2015/16.

The reduction in the number of children requiring adoptive homes has coincided with an increase in the number of approved adopters waiting to have children placed with them. This follows a sustained advertising campaign by the Department for Education to encourage more applications from anyone interested in adopting a child. There are now far more available adopters than children requiring adoptive families. Crucially, the children who actually wait to find adoptive families are the ones with complex needs; in sibling groups, with existing disabilities or who are likely to have inherited potentially serious developmental problems which will manifest when they are older – the children whom the current approved pool of adopters feels unable to care for.

Currently, there are 8 children in adoptive placements awaiting Adoption Order Hearings, which will count towards the final number at the end of the financial year.

Monthly monitoring takes place of performance against indicators. The national adoption scorecard process was designed by the DfE to benchmark performance and the indicators below were introduced to measure this:

- **LAC51 Average time (12 months) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted.**
- **LAC52 Average time (12 months) between a local authority receiving court authority (Placement Order) to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family.**

Out of the 15 children that were adopted in 2015-16, 6 were placed within timescale since being received into care (40%). Of these children, 8 were matched within time scale from date of the Placement Order (53%).

Nationally, Enfield met the LAC52 average but not the LAC51 average. There were a number of contributing factors for the scorecard indicator relating to the nine children that were placed out of timescale (LAC51).

These include protracted and complex court proceedings with the timescale beyond the influence of the local authority, cases requiring extensive overseas assessments of extended family members, sibling groups with complex needs which made family finding more difficult and children being adopted by their foster carers with whom they may have lived for a number of years..

There is growing recognition within the DfE that the scorecard indicators are not sufficiently sensitive to reflect the range of complex circumstances of the children and families involved.

A detailed quarterly report on children waiting to be matched with adopters is provided to the Lead Member and DCS to reassure them that robust family finding is under way for every child.

3.7 Adoptive Families

During 2015-16:

Enfield approved 8 sets of adopters. This was a deliberate reduction on the 19 approved the previous year as a more targeted approach has been taken with the aim of recruiting adopters better able to take on the complex children awaiting a match. In 2016-17, 2 sets of adopters have been approved to date with 1 more being presented to Panel for approval on 31/10/16. Seven sets of adopters are currently in assessment with 3 more potential families to date booked on the November foundation day training.

3.8 Support to Families and Adopted Adults

The consortium has developed excellent support services for both adopters and special guardians, including thematic support groups, therapeutic interventions and bespoke training opportunities. Each borough provides a case worker service for adoptive/special guardianship families in crisis. Joint commissioning across six boroughs has secured excellent value for money in contracted services. The consortium has given formal, affiliated membership to a number of voluntary adoption agencies including After Adoption, the Post Adoption Centre, We Are Family and the Inter Country Adoption Centre. These partnerships are delivering preferential services to the boroughs in the consortium, and feedback to a Scrutiny Panel Workstream evidenced how highly these are valued by our service users.

To date:

- 18 adopted adults are currently receiving an access to records service.
- 15 adopted adults and birth relatives received support and guidance with regards to searching for extended birth family members separated by adoption. 14 are currently still receiving this service.
- 48 families are currently in receipt of adoption support packages.
- To date, there are 78 adoption allowances and 149 Special Guardianship Allowances being paid. There has been no increase in the number of adoption allowances being paid but an increase of 49 in the number of SG allowances being paid from the previous year.

3.9 The Adoption Support Fund

- The Adoption Support Fund was implemented by the DfE in May 2015 and has proved to be invaluable for adoptive families in need of therapeutic input. Recently the fund was extended to Special Guardians also. The ASF was established because many families needed some kind of support following adoption and too many had struggled to get the help they needed in the past. The ASF enabled them to access services they needed more easily alleviating financial demands placed on local authorities to provide costly therapeutic services. In 2015-16, 14 families benefitted from this fund with a steady flow of families continuing to make use of the fund in this financial year.

3.10 Adoption Service Planned Actions October 2016 – March 2017

- The London Adoption Board is leading on the regionalisation agenda across the Capital. There is, as yet, no clear plan for how this will impact on individual adoption services. It is anticipated that while some services will be organised across London, others will be delivered by smaller groups of authorities working in partnership – a model similar to the current consortium arrangement.
- The demand for support services to adoptive and special guardianship families in crisis has continued to increase, driven in part by the growing number of children being placed with extended family members, many of whom have their own problems. These placements have a higher risk of breakdown, particularly if the child has additional needs. In response, the service has been restructured with the responsibility for the special guardianship assessments and support now being cited in the adoption team.

- Recruitment initiatives to meet the needs of our children continue to be a priority. On 20/10/16, during National Adoption Week, the consortium boroughs will be facilitating a large event in Hackney, also as part of Black History Month, to raise awareness and the profile of adoption with the aim of attracting potential applicants for our black and dual heritage children in need of adoption.
- The recent Scrutiny Panel workstream focussing on adoption found the service to be a very good one. Adoption in Enfield received a judgement of 'Good' from Ofsted in 2015. Since then, a small number of adoption services in the country have been awarded a judgement of Outstanding. The Head of Service is reviewing practice in these authorities to determine if any lessons can be learned to improve our local practice.

3.11 Staffing and Accommodation

The Fostering and Adoption Services are based at Triangle House. Both teams are staffed with experienced practitioners and managers. The proximity to the Looked After Children's Teams continues to be helpful in promoting good planning for children in care.

The Advanced Social Work Practitioner post in the adoption team was deleted following the retirement of this worker, thus making a saving for the department. Following this, the Adoption Team Manager was promoted to a Service Manager position for both adoption and fostering service. There is a new Team Manager and Deputy Team Manager in place in the adoption team with shared supervisory responsibility for the six social workers in the team. Team members have vast experience and specialism in all areas of adoption work. Due to the changing landscape in permanency for children (i.e. decrease in adoptions and increase in special guardianship), a decision has been made to transfer the special guardianship work from the fostering service to the adoption service. There is currently a transition process taking place with good joint working between the two services to ensure a smooth handover.

This last year has been difficult for the Fostering Service due to staff shortages relating to ill-health and maternity leaves. This, together with the departure of the fostering team manager, put a strain on the remaining team members. Despite this, service delivery to our children and foster carers remained of the highest standard. The team is now fully staffed and far more settled.

On 19/9/16, a new Marketing & Recruitment started and has proved to be an asset to both the Fostering and Adoption Services. It is anticipated that the recruitment of foster carers and adopters will increase as a result of the campaigns that this worker is involved in.

3.12 Staff Training

Staff training and development needs are met both through the Consortium and Enfield's Training and Development Service which offers a comprehensive programme. Team members are expected to attend training to ensure their ongoing development needs are met, as well as maintaining their social work HCPC registrations. On 4th December 2015, social work professionals throughout the Childrens Services attended a social work conference where a number of impressive guest speakers attended and gave presentations. Another social work conference is currently being planned for 25th November 2016. In addition to training courses and conferences, annual Development Days are held covering different topics. These are attended by social work professionals, education and health professionals, and foster carers. The next Development Day has been arranged for 17th January 2017.

3.13 Fostering and Adoption Panels

The fostering and adoption panels are held separately on a regular basis. Each has an independent Panel Chair experienced in the work of fostering and adoption. The Panels are made up of a group of people from varying backgrounds either with personal experience of fostering and adoption or from their professional backgrounds. Both Panels include four independent members and two Councillors representing the two parties. The Panels continue to play an important role in providing quality assurance and consider recommendations on the suitability of applicants wishing to foster or adopt. The Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision based on the information provided to him and the recommendations made.

3.14 The North London Adoption & 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 and adoptive placements for children. It meets regularly at both a strategic Heads of Service level as well as at operational level.

The consortium continues to benefit children and their families across the boroughs.

- There is a rolling programme of training offered to adoptive families and special guardians, covering a range of topics.
- Adopters and Special Guardians have the benefit of attending support groups with attendance from speakers on topics of interest identified by families.
- The consortium contract with the Post Adoption Centre continues to be a more cost-effective way of providing a range of services to all people affected by adoption. The contract benefits families with complex adoption support needs for assessment and treatment. The Post Adoption Centre also provides outreach support to families across the consortium boroughs, including a monthly surgery in Enfield, which can also be accessed by professionals involved in care planning.
- It has seen the development of initiatives such as fostering recruitment events within different faith groups e.g. Muslim community held at Edmonton mosque.
- Foster carers attending cross Borough preparation training groups.
- Enfield hosted and facilitated the support group for the Consortium Parent and Child foster scheme.
- The consortium is looking at developing a Teenage Fostering Scheme to recruit and support foster carers in offering placements to teenagers with complex needs.

3.15 User Feedback

There is a range of mechanisms in place to allow the Fostering and Adoption Services to monitor customer satisfaction:

- Evaluations following fostering and adoption preparation training groups.
- Feedback forms for applicants and professionals to complete post-panel attendance.
- Feedback from consortium families that have attended Enfield's fostering and adoption preparation training groups.
- Letters and cards from families giving positive feedback on the services they have received from staff members.
- The adopters forum (which is adopter led) gives families the opportunity to voice their views and suggest ways in which to improve services where there are gaps.
- The recently developed We Are Family organisation representing families across the consortium and London as a whole.
- The recent adoption workstream project resulting in written and verbal feedback to Councillors.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

This report is for information.

5. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To report to Members on the work and performance of Enfield's Fostering and Adoption Services.

6. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, RESOURCES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS

6.1 Financial Implications

Although the adoption allowances have remained stable in number over the past few years, the SGO allowances have continued to grow showing a significant increase over the last three years. In 2015-16 there was an overspend on adoption and SG allowances of £129,000 and in this financial year we are projecting an overspend of £115,000.

In fostering, there was an overspend on the fostering allowances in 2015-16 of £304,000 and in this financial year we are projecting an overspend of £106,000. This correlates with the fact that there has been a steady increase in the number of in-house foster carers being recruited and approved over the past few years where fostering allowances are payable. The increase in fostering allowances has been offset against the inter-agency fees paid when children are placed with foster carers approved by other agencies.

6.2 Legal Implications

The work of the adoption service is undertaken in accordance with the Adoption Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. Section 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires all local authorities to maintain a service to meet the needs of all people affected by adoption.

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.

6.3 Property Implications

There are no property implications.

7. KEY RISKS

Any operational risks are minimised by attention to good practice in recruiting and preparing foster carers and adopters, good preparation for children, attention to detail during the introduction and transition process, and continuing support post placement.

8. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES

8.1 Fairness for All

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

8.2 Growth and Sustainability

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

8.3 Strong Communities

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

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

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

Enfield Council has been assessed against the requirements of the Equality Framework and was accredited at the excellent level. This award has inspired the Council to continue to tackle inequality in the Borough and continue to build on the strengths of our diverse group of Councillors and staff groups that reflect the wider community to promote positive dialogue with our residents and service users. The Council is committed to being an exemplar of best practice in all equalities work.

10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

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

11. 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 to health and safety arise.

12. 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.

13. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

The increase in the recruitment of local foster carers in Enfield will ensure that children are placed in the locality to which they are familiar with. 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.

Adoption provides a permanent home for children who cannot live within their own families. Adopters are supported to access both universal and specialist health services.

Background Papers

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Children Act 2004

The Training & Development Standards in Foster Care

Adoption & Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011

Adoption & Fostering Services Regulations 2011

Family & Friends Statutory Guidance 2011