



# Enfield Annual Fostering and Adoption Report 2016/2017

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Version	0.1	Page	1 - 12	Date of next review	June 2018

## Enfield Annual Fostering and Adoption Report (2016/2017)

### 1. BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 The North London Adoption & Fostering Consortium

The consortium involves 6 boroughs, Enfield, Barnet, Camden, Hackney, Haringey and Islington who work together sharing training, recruitment activities and fostering and adoptive placements for children. The consortium continues to benefit children/YP and their families. The consortium meets regularly at both a strategic Heads of Service level as well as at operational level. It develops an annual action plan which is presented to the annual AGM attended by professionals across all the 6 boroughs.

### 2. FOSTERING

#### 2.1 Foster Carers

In 2016/17 Enfield recruited 12 mainstream foster carers, the second highest number in the consortium with Hackney being the highest.

Barnet	Camden	Enfield	Hackney	Haringey	Islington
7	9	12	18	6	11

In 2017/18, Enfield has approved 8 carers to date and has another 10 in assessment who are booked into future fostering panels in this financial year. The next Skills to Foster training course is scheduled for September 2017 with 4-6 potential applicants on the list to attend so far.

#### 2.2 Recruitment

While our recruitment strategies are delivering positive results, these are offset by the number of carers resigning each year. In 2016/17, 29 foster carers left the service. Although this appears to be an unusually high number, for many of them, the reasons for their deregistration related to positive outcomes, for example, 6 carers resigned from fostering as they adopted the children placed with them, 6 were due to retirement, 1 carer went on to offer permanency to the child via an SGO and 3 were family and friends carers where the children they had been caring for had reached adulthood.

For the remaining 13 foster carers who were deregistered, this was for a variety of reasons: 2 related to allegations and standard of care issues resulting in the department's need to deregister them, 2 were deregistered due to their lack of commitment, bearing in mind they had not accepted a placement for over a year, 2 carers moved out of London and resigned as it was not practical for them to continue to foster for Enfield, 2 decided to return to work full-time and they felt this was not conducive to fostering, 1 carer was concerned at the impact that fostering was having on her own child, 1 carer met a new partner and did not want to be reassessed with her partner, 2 carers resigned as fostering 'did not meet their expectations' and 1 couple resigned as due to their relationship breakdown and subsequent separation.

Where appropriate, foster carers are offered exit interviews and offers of support are made to encourage them to remain with the service where possible.

The aim is to increase our pool of foster carers to meet the demand of the children in need of fostering and the team's Recruitment and Marketing Officer is continuously looking at ways in which we can recruit carers for Enfield. Raising the profile of fostering for Enfield is crucial and efforts to do this have included the following:

- Regular 'myth buster' messages are sent to the foster carer prospective group on file (this group consists of around 330 households), via the online e-mail generator portal.
- A good number of information events have been created across various locations in Enfield and the Hertfordshire border. These include the larger supermarket stores, Enfield theatres, libraries, North Middlesex hospital and the Civic Centre. Popular venues are being visited again and new ones explored such as the NHS floors at the Civic Centre. We also have the Enfield Town Show coming up on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017. These have been generating up to 10 quality leads each time. However festival and family fun type events such as the Carers Fun Day at Enfield Town library were not so productive so we are not looking to repeat those.
- A number of marketing items have been redesigned. This included the standard newspaper advert, to make prominent the key benefits of Fostering with Enfield Council e.g. generous allowance, and the A5 leaflet used to hand out at outreach events to detail the comprehensive support on offer to Enfield foster carers.

Some further feedback indicated interest in visuals that appeal to older individuals and people who own pets.

- A good range of existing foster carers are available to support with events. There could be more from BME backgrounds who are currently underrepresented in this group and so the team will be working to address this.

### **2.3 Maximising Technology**

This has also improved since our Recruitment and Marketing Officer has been in post:

- The Fostering (and Adoption) pages on the Council website are better organised and the friendly URL [www.enfield.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.enfield.gov.uk/fostering) has been resurrected. We are in the process of improving our visual elements to the website (in line with our Consortium partners) and are currently exploring a fostering and adoption microsite for this purpose.
- Foster Bytes, the e-newsletter for foster carers, is being produced quarterly. Regular features include management news, updates from Enfield Fostering Association training and support groups and the reward for introducing a family member or friend to fostering with Enfield Council. In 2016-17, 2 foster carers were assessed and approved as a result of recommendations to them from existing carers. In this financial year to date, 1 potential carer is currently in assessment as a result of a recommendation to her from an existing carer.

### **2.4 Fostering Enquiries**

In 2016-17, Enfield Council received 241 enquiries. This year, we have received 100 enquiries/expressions of interest to date, the highest at this stage in comparison to previous years. Looking at where these enquires have been generated, the top three sources have been outreach events, followed by the Council website and then print advertising. The recruitment team, including the team's Recruitment and Marketing Officer, is continuously monitoring success and periods when enquiries and expressions of interest fall so that we can look at ways in which to improve our figures and increase the prospect of recruiting potential carers.

## **2.5 Placements**

We currently have 129 Enfield fostering households (this included family and friends foster carers) and 8 children placed in consortium foster placements. We have 108 mainstream fostering households, currently providing homes for 142 of our looked after children. Vacancies in 18 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 12 sets of approved family and friends' foster carers and 9 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 129 sets of carers must have an allocated qualified social worker to support them, provide regular supervision and prepare a comprehensive annual review.

## **2.6 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.

Another support mechanism in place for our foster carers is via the foster carer co-ordinator who is a long-standing carer for the department. She acts as a link between carers and the fostering team/social services and as an experienced carer herself is available to offer support to other carers, in particular newly approved carers. The foster carer co-ordinator also facilitates the foster carers' support groups and is the Chair for the Enfield Fostering Association.

## **2.7 Fostering Service Planned Actions 2017-18**

- To ensure that at least 15 unconnected foster carers are approved during the financial year 2017/2018.
- To launch a digital adoption campaign via CAN to target prospective adopters across the consortium boroughs, who are able to consider older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs.
- To participate in a working group to produce a fostering (and adoption) recruitment strategy targeting the common need amongst the consortium boroughs.
- To work with the adoption and fostering teams to identify marketing and communication needs and provide the necessary tools to achieve goals and outcomes (e.g. updating and improving literature, promotional items for use at events).
- To work with the Council's web team to update the fostering (and adoption) web pages to improve its visual and navigation appeal.
- To increase social media presence by producing new posts to the pages, using Face Book boosting for targeted campaigns and messages, and using Twitter promotions for targeted campaigns.
- To increase the pool of foster carers that help at events, targeting carers from backgrounds that reflect the needs of children requiring placements.

### 3. ADOPTION

#### 3.1 Children

During 2016-17:

Enfield obtained 10 Adoption Orders, the third highest number in the North London Consortium. However, during this year, Enfield obtained the highest number of SGOs noting a significant increase in comparison to the consortium borough in which all experienced a slight reduction in SGOs to the previous year.

<b>Borough</b>	Barnet	Camden	Enfield	Hackney	Haringey	Islington
<b>Adoption Orders</b>	8	8	10	19	11	14
<b>SGOs</b>	30	17	42	14	10	15

Across the consortium, there was a 15% reduction in adoptions from the previous year. This reflects the ongoing 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 2017/18 to date, Enfield has secured 7 adoption orders with another 8 anticipated before the end of the financial year (barring parental appeals). Special Guardianship Orders continue to rise with 10 SGOs having been granted already.

Currently, there are 12 children subject to family finding processes. Out of these 12 children, 5 have had families identified for them and the matches are due to be presented to the adoption panel within the next 1-3 months, 2 siblings have been matched at panel already but there has been some delay in placing the children due to father's appeal, potential families are in the early stages of being considered for 3 children (including 2 siblings) and 2 children are still subject to family finding processes. Regarding one of the children where a family has yet to be identified, it is going to prove very difficult to find a family as this child is showing signs of autism and is awaiting an appointment with the child development team.

Monthly monitoring of performance against indicators continues to take place and the DfE continue to use the adoption scorecard process to benchmark performance via the indicators as follows:

- **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.**

10 children were adopted in 2016-17 (including 2 siblings). These children will impact on Enfield's adoption scorecard for LAC51 (child entering care to being placed) as these children were out of timescale for this performance indicator. However, for LAC52 (from placement order to being matched with a family), 90% of these children were placed in a timely manner (within 5-8 months).

Contributing factors for the poor LAC51 performance indicator (child entering care to being placed) varied, for example, appeals by family members, requests by the court for assessments of (unsuitable) family members and dispute with a child's guardian regarding a child with a disability. Delays were caused as a result.

Quite significantly, the adoption scorecards that were the poorest related to two children adopted by their foster carers when in fact, the outcomes for these children are better than for the children where the scorecards are the most impressive. The reason for this is that the child is often placed from being received into care with a plan of long-term fostering then the foster carer expresses an interest in adopting the child many years later. For LAC51 this appears extremely poor, even though it is an excellent outcome.

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 senior managers to reassure them that robust family finding is under way for every child.



In our efforts to avoid delay as much as possible, we recently agreed a new procedure whereby all our prospective adopters are assessed and approved for both mainstream adoption and foster to adopt, as a default system this will be of greater benefit to Enfield's children where adoption is the plan. While foster to adopt is not right for all families, there are families that can manage such placement via these routes with support from the department.

### **3.2 Adoptive Families**

During 2016-17:

Enfield approved 4 sets of adopters, which is the same as two of the consortium boroughs. Although this figure is poor in comparison to the previous year when 8 sets of adopters were approved, this is balanced with the massive increase of children placed with Special Guardians, thus a lesser need for adoptive families. In 2017-18 to date, 2 sets of adopters have been approved with 5 families currently in assessment and due to be presented to the adoption panel by the end of the financial year.

### **3.3 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, the Inter Country Adoption Centre and the Body & Soul Adoption Support Programmes. 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:

- 20 adopted adults are currently receiving an access to records service.
- 19 adopted adults and birth relatives received support and guidance with regards to searching for extended birth family members separated by adoption with 16 currently still receiving this service.

- 52 families are currently in receipt of adoption support packages.
- To date, there are 71 adoption allowances and 154 Special Guardianship Allowances being paid. There has been a reduction in the number of adoption allowances being paid but an increase of in the number of SG allowances being paid which is expected to rise as indicated by the projected planned SGOs that we are anticipating.

### **3.4 The Adoption Support Fund**

- The Adoption Support Fund continues to benefit adoptive families in need of therapeutic input. This fund has recently been extended to Special Guardians also, as a result of post-placement difficulties that were being experienced by SG carers. The ASF has continued to alleviate financial demands placed on local authorities to provide costly therapeutic services. In 2016-17, 26 families benefitted from this fund (more than double in comparison to the previous year when 12 families benefitted from this fund).

### **3.5 Adoption Service Planned Actions 2017-18**

- The consortium Marketing, Communications and Recruitment Team is planning to launch a digital adoption campaign via CAN to target prospective adopters, who are able to consider older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs.
- A collaborative approach to producing a best practice model on transitions from fostering into adoption to be led by John Simmonds OBE, Head of Policy and Research at CoramBAAF, with social work staff from adoption and fostering teams in the consortium.
- A steering group to develop an action plan for Hackney's therapeutic Clinic Hub service expansion which will provide a range of therapeutic services for all consortium agencies to access under the ASF terms.
- A highly rated course – “Going Back to Go Forwards” run by Louis Sydney, a psychotherapist with lengthy experience of working in adoption, to be set up for the consortium boroughs under the ASF as a rolling arrangement.

- Body & Soul Support Programme leaders to look at how families can continue to access the programmes with limited funding available since the cap on the ASF.

### **3.6 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.

On 2/8/17 the adoption team situated on the first floor joined the fostering team on the second floor. The move went well and all staff members appear to be settled. The advantage of having the two teams near each other is that it will provide more scope for joint working as often there is a lot of cross over between fostering and adoption such as moving children on from fostering to adoptive placements.

Currently there is a vacancy in the adoption team due to early retirement of one of the adoption team members, and two vacancies in the fostering team as a result of a social worker's move to take up a secondment opportunity in the Looked After Children's Service and the other social worker leaving to take up a position nearer to where she is living. We are currently recruiting to these vacant posts.

### **3.7 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 25<sup>th</sup> November 2016, social work professionals throughout the Childrens Services attended a social work conference where a number of impressive guest speakers attended and gave presentations. The conference included a play called 'Chelsea's Choice' which raises awareness of child sexual exploitation, currently a very concerning and high profile issue nationally. A Development Day attended by education, health and social work professionals, and foster carers was held on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2017 with a focus on "Making & Maintaining Emotionally Supported Placements".

### **3.8 Fostering and Adoption Panels**

The Fostering and Adoption 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, the Assistant Director for Children's Services, will make the final decision based on the information provided to her and the recommendations made. A joint training day was held for panel members and fostering team members on 7/7/17 on the Health Needs of Looked After Children. A further joint training day has been scheduled for 1/12/17 on Managing Allegations Against Foster Carers.

### **3.9 User Feedback**

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

- Evaluation feedback forms from applicants 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 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) giving families the opportunity to voice their views and suggest ways in which to improve services where there are gaps.
- The We Are Family organisation representing families across the consortium and London as a whole.