

REPORT TO: OSC

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REPORT TITLE: Overview & Scrutiny Committee Report

REPORT AUTHOR/S:

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PURPOSE OF REPORT:

This report updates the Scrutiny Panel on the work of the Fostering and Adoption Services since August 2017. It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards that Members receive regular reports on the work of the Fostering and Adoption Services. The reports attached as appendices provide comprehensive updates and information relating to the good work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Services and provide statistics relating to the recruitment of foster carers and adopters, as well as Orders relating to children placed with adopters and special guardians.

Our fostering and adoption recruitment strategy is reflective of the need to focus on families that can meet our children's complex needs.

Currently we have 15 children placed with prospective adopters awaiting Adoption Orders.

We have 134 foster families (including family & friends and Reg. 24 (temporary approval carers) and 141 looked after children placed). 43.5% of all our looked after children are placed with in house foster carers.

Recently we successfully developed a business plan to increase our fostering second and subsequent child rate to match our first child rate, in line with other local authorities in a competitive market.

1. BACKGROUND

See Appendices attached to this report

1.1 The Fostering and Adoption Teams

The Fostering and Adoption Services are based at Triangle House. Both services 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. 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 required to attend training to ensure their ongoing development needs are met, as well as maintaining their social work HCPC registrations. In addition to the ongoing training that is provided throughout the year, staff members across all children's teams are invited to attend the annual Social Work Conference which always has an excellent attendance rate.

Enfield is a part of the North London Adoption & Fostering Consortium (NLAFC) made up of Enfield, Barnet, Camden, Hackney, Haringey and Islington and the boroughs work together, sharing training, recruitment activities and fostering and adoptive placements for children across the six boroughs. Shared planning and funding has allowed the consortium boroughs to deliver more cost effective and innovative services to foster carers, adopters and special guardians across the six boroughs. The consortium meets regularly at both a strategic Heads of Service level as well as at an operational level.

The areas of specialism within Enfield fostering service are 2-fold: the recruitment and assessment of foster carers; and the support and development of foster carers.

All foster carers have a named supervising social worker following their approval who provides regular supervision and who supports the carers' professional development. A 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 courses. It has been acknowledged that our foster carers are being asked to look after children with increasingly complex needs and we are currently looking at training courses to build resilience amongst our carers in managing our children's complex needs.

The Adoption Service has always had three main functions: to recruit and assess prospective adopters; to family find and match suitable adopters for our children where adoption is the plan; and to support adoptive families. This service now has the additional responsibility for assessing and supporting Special Guardian carers and has been re-named the Adoption and Special Guardianship Service. Special Guardians are carers identified from a child's extended family or friends network, formally assessed and approved and who share parental responsibility with the child's birth parents. It provides a child with an alternative permanent family while stopping short of the severing of all legal ties with the birth parents, as happens in adoption.

The independent fostering and adoption panels continue to play an important role in providing quality assurance and their members consider and agree recommendations on the suitability of applicants wishing to foster or adopt. The Agency Decision Maker within the local authority will make the final decision on approval based on the information and recommendations provided by the panels. Joint panel training between panels members and fostering and adoption team members is held 2-3 times a year which is extremely useful to ensure knowledge on legislation and practice issues are shared.

1.2 Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies (RAA)

Currently, work is in place to progress the DfE's vision for Regionalisation of Adoption Services. The six boroughs in the current consortium, will become the Regional Adoption Agency for North London. Intensive planning is currently underway to confirm the organisational arrangements and changes required to develop the new legal entity. This is a very significant project bringing together professionals from social care, HR, finance and IT from the different boroughs. It is anticipated that the project will be completed in April 2019.

1.3 Recruitment

Fostering recruitment is robust with the numbers for 2018/19 likely to consolidate recent improvements. In 2017-18, we assessed and approved 18 foster families (an improvement on the previous year when 12 foster families

were approved). In 2017-18 Enfield had the highest number of approvals of any of the consortium partner boroughs. We are anticipating a similar or higher number of approvals by the end of this financial year this current financial year.

In 2017-18, Enfield assessed and approved 11 adoptive families which is an improvement on the previous year when only 4 adoptive families were approved. Again, Enfield had the highest number of approvals in 2017-18 compared to its consortium counterparts. Efforts to recruit and assess adopters are ongoing with a particular focus on families that can meet the complex needs of our children.

There has been an increase in the number of SGOs granted over the last 2-3 years. In 2016-17, 42 SGOs were granted (32 on children previously in care and 10 on children in need). In 2017-18, 32 SGOs were granted (19 on children previously in care and 13 on children in need). This year to date, 13 SGOs have been granted with more expected by the end of the financial year. We currently have 7 special guardianship assessments being completed with numbers of applications continuing to rise.

In 2017-18, 16 Adoption Orders were granted, the highest in the consortium. We are anticipating 14 Adoption Orders on children by the end of this financial year, including four sibling groups.

The aim is always to increase our pool of foster carers and adopters to meet the demand of the children in need of fostering and children where adoption is the plan.

The team's Recruitment and Marketing Officer is continuously looking for new and innovative ways in which we can recruit foster carers for Enfield. Raising the profile of fostering for Enfield is crucial and efforts to do this have included:

- "Myth busting" messages being sent to prospective foster carer groups.
- Information events across various locations in Enfield and the Hertfordshire border (i.e. larger supermarket stores, Enfield theatres, libraries, local hospitals and the Civic Centre).

- Double page adverts in the local papers featuring current foster carers and case studies
- Posters and electronic board throughout the borough.
- Our marketing materials have been redesigned to attract more interest from carers for sibling groups and older children

Maximising Technology:

The fostering and adoption pages on the Council website have been updated and the friendly URL www.enfield.gov.uk/fostering has been resurrected.

Our visual element to the website has been improved and a fostering and adoption microsite has been installed for this purpose.

Our successful media campaign last year resulted in regular flow and increased traffic to websites and social media channels.

Spikes to the adoption site corresponded to event marketing activity and there were notable spikes to the fostering site centre around the parent and child video promotion. There was a similar pattern for our Facebook channels and increases in likes that corresponded directly with boosted adverts.

Work is currently underway to develop electronic applications through the Children's Portal.

2. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- The number of adoption allowances granted has remained stable over the past few years. Since the last OCS report in August 2017, the adoption allowances have increased by only one from 72 to 73. The payment of an ongoing adoption allowance is discretionary, and we are successfully using one off payments in their place.
- However, what continues to be a financial challenge is the number of SGO allowances being paid as there is no legal discretion either over the payment of these allowances or their level.
- The fostering allowances are comparable with other local authorities and recently, a review of the second and subsequent child rate element was aligned with the first child rate as part of a recruitment and retention initiative. This was necessary to bring Enfield in line with the other local authorities in the consortium in a competitive market and to avoid using

costly independent fostering agencies. There is a national shortage of foster carers which is keenest in London. Recruiting foster carers is highly competitive and many local families are still choosing to foster with independent fostering agencies. Our marketing plan highlights the benefits of fostering for Enfield but a constant focus on recruitment is crucial. In particular, we want to recruit more foster carers for siblings, older children and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

- In adoption, we need prospective adopters who can meet the ethnic and religious backgrounds of our children and adopters who are able to consider children with developmental uncertainties.
- Nationally, all adoption agencies are required to implement the DfE's RAA plan which is an enormous task. The current uncertainty for staff working in adoption is daunting. However, Enfield has the advantage of belonging to an established six-borough consortium partnership and will be able to influence the development and decision-making in delivering the RAA.
- 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.

3. NEXT STEPS

- To recruit and assess 15+ foster carers in 2018-19
- To focus on a recruitment campaign that encourages foster carers to foster sibling groups using the second and subsequent child fee recently implemented as an incentive.
- To help shape the implementation the of the new Regional Adoption Agency for North London by April 2019 to ensure that the new arrangements achieve the anticipated improved outcomes for this group of children,

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel note the content of this report and embedded attachments:

Adoption Annual Report 2017-18.



Adoption Annual
Report 2017-18.pdf

Fostering Annual Report 2017-18



Fostering Annual
Report 2017-18.pdf