

REPORT TO: OSC**DATE: 4th September 2019****REPORT TITLE: Overview & Scrutiny Committee Report****REPORT AUTHOR/S:****Debbie Michael, Fostering & Adoption/SG Service Manager****Email: Debbie.Michael@enfield.gov.uk****Telephone: 020 8379 8480****PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

This report updates the Scrutiny Panel on the work of the Fostering and Adoption Services since September 2018. 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 have 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 and Special Guardianship Service is situated in the same area as the Fostering Service which has improved communications and planning for children amongst team members.

The Adoption Service has 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. The Special Guardianship Service has responsibility for assessing and supporting Special Guardian carers. These 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. The Chairs for both panels have extensive social work backgrounds and are particularly experienced in the work of fostering and adoption. Panel 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 twice a year which is extremely useful to ensure knowledge on legislation and practice issues are shared.

1.2 Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies (RAA)

A huge amount of work has been taking place to progress the DfE's vision for Regionalisation of Adoption Services. The six boroughs in the current consortium have joined to become the Regional Adoption Agency for North London. Intensive planning for this project has brought together professionals from social care, HR, finance and IT from the different boroughs. Following a recruitment and interviewing process in June 2019, a structure for the RAA has now been put into place and a 'go live' date has been agreed for 1st October 2019. The Special Guardianship Service will remain in its current form with Enfield and a restructure of the service will be looked at as a single service.

1.3 Recruitment

In 2018-19, we assessed and approved 14 foster families. Our target was 15 which we would have reached, however, due to unexpected complications with one of our assessments, there was a slight delay with this family being approved in that financial year. In comparison to our consortium counterparts, Enfield was third in their numbers of approvals so in the top three of the six boroughs.

Our approvals target for this financial year has been agreed at 15, however, we are aiming to achieve 18 approvals if possible. Currently we have 16 applicants in assessment. Our next Skills to Foster Training course is in October 2019 so we are hoping to add more to the number of assessments. Our need is in all age group categories with a specific need for teenage placements and sibling placements.

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 as at August 2019, 21 SGOs have been granted on children previously in care with more expected by the end of the financial year. The increase is significant as the current number at the stage of only being in the fourth month of this financial year is more than the total granted for the whole of the previous year. We currently have 12 special guardianship assessments being completed with numbers of applications continuing to rise.

In 2018-19, 13 Adoption Orders were granted. We are anticipating a similar number of Adoption Orders by the end of this financial year.

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. It is anticipated that the implementation of the Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies in October 2019 will result in a larger pool of adopters as adoption professional across the RAA pull their resources together to maximise growth

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:

- Increased visibility through widespread advertising on buses, tube/rail stations and street posters in the Enfield area
- Adverts and editorials in the local papers and magazines featuring current foster carers and case studies
- 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).
- The production of a new fostering recruitment short commercial to be viewed on a giant TV screen at the Palace Gardens Shopping Centre and for continued promotion online thereafter
- Our marketing materials have been redesigned to attract more interest from carers for sibling groups and older children, as well as carers from white ethnic backgrounds (to reflect Enfield's largest LAC grouping)
- Launching the idea to foster carers of recruiting friends and family to be carers by organising their own 'STAR – Start Thinking About Recruitment' parties
- Joining up efforts to promote fostering and the children's portal at the same time (i.e. offering one dedicated page for portal comms in the 4-page Enfield wrap booked for fostering and a page in the new 24-page Fostering Connect magazine produced by the team responsible for the Enfield Independent and Enfield Connect publications)

Maximising Technology:

Visits to Enfield's fostering and adoption microsite shows a steady upward trend and were boosted by digital marketing and social media promotions in targeted months, especially during Foster Care Fortnight month. The service is also linking with a select number of GP surgeries for banner advertising on their website to coincide with their facility to book appointments online. The fostering and adoption microsite signposts visitors to the Consortium site for adoption and the Children's Portal for fostering enquiries. Following the launch of the Portal, three enquiries were received in the first month.

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 2018, the adoption allowances have decreased from 73 to 67 as a result of children turning 18 years of age and no longer meeting the criteria for an allowance. 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 over the payment of these allowances or their level. Currently we are paying 226 SGO allowances and the number continues to grow as more and more children are made subject to Special Guardianship Orders. Already as at 13/08/19 21 SGOs have been granted with many more anticipated by the end of this financial year.
- The fostering allowances are comparable with other local authorities and following a review of the second and subsequent child rate element which 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 and older 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 has been an enormous task, some work still needs to be done in time for the 'go live' date on 1st October 2019. The uncertainty of how the RAA may impact on Enfield's children where adoption is the plan is

daunting as, historically, Enfield has had a good record of placing its children with adopters and achieving good outcomes.

- 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 2019-20
- To focus on a recruitment campaign that encourages foster carers to foster sibling groups and older children by using a robust approach in marketing strategies and team members' expertise to attract and encourage foster carers to come to Enfield.
- Having a marketing strategy that maximises technology and using creative ideas to attract potential carers to Enfield (as outlined on page 5 above).
- To be involved in implementing the Regionalisation of Adoption Agencies for North London by 1st October 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 2018-19



Adoption Annual
Report 2018-19.pdf

Fostering Annual Report 2018-19



Fostering Annual
Report 2018-19.pdf