

Addendum to the Annual Fostering Service Report for Scrutiny Panel on 10th December 2020

This addendum responds to specific requests for information from Elected Members, relating to how the Fostering Service has supported foster carers during the coronavirus pandemic. It should be read alongside the Fostering Annual Report 2020. It sets out the information requested under each of the questions posed

- **How did the Local Authority carry out its statutory duties, i.e. Unannounced Visits and visiting new foster carers homes prior to coming to Panel? Did it make sure that reports are signed and dated by Social Workers and Foster Carers with an electronic signature etc.**

The Service has a regularly updated Coronavirus Risk Assessment framework in place, setting out the steps taken to ensure the continuation of service delivery and the safety of foster carers, staff and children during the pandemic. While many foster carers have understandably been anxious about the risks from the virus, they have been remarkably resilient in continuing to deliver high quality care to Enfield's looked after children. Additional support has been provided where necessary including funding for taxis to avoid taking children on public transport and the re organisation of the Contact Centre to ensure social distancing when children are taken to and from contact sessions.

From March until July 2020, 'visits' to foster carers were completed via virtual means. However, the level of support to foster carers was increased with all team members calling their carers on a weekly or bi-weekly basis (depending on the experience and resilience of the carers and whether there were any difficulties in the placement). A dedicated 24-hour/7 day a week telephone support service, in addition to the mainstream out of hours service, was put into place by the fostering team, which enabled foster carers to have a round- the-clock point of call for Covid-19 concerns during times of anxiety. This helpline remained in place until August when it was no longer required. Foster carers continue to have access to the mainstream out of hours service which is co-facilitated by the fostering team managers during weekdays until 10.00pm. After this time, and at weekends, the foster carers can access the Emergency Duty Team service.

Face to face visits to all foster carers are now back in place, unless there is a Health and Safety factor preventing this. In line with the Children's Services protocol, Risk Assessments take place prior to every visit. These assessments consider a number of factors to ensure that the safety of all parties is maintained. PPE is available and used during visits where necessary.

Unannounced Visits

The requirement to comply with Government guidelines and the necessity of completing a robust Risk Assessment prior to each visit, meant that unannounced visits were put on hold. The increased contacts with foster carers and close liaison with children's social workers ensured that any concerns were identified and addressed in a timely manner.

Unannounced 'doorstep' visits were completed if difficulties were identified. The new lockdown has meant that unannounced 'in person' visits are not yet able to be resumed as a matter of routine, but the service is starting to complete these 'virtually'. This involves the worker calling up the foster carer and asking to be taken on a virtual tour of the home. This process will be kept under review.

Visits prior to panel

No comprehensive assessment could be completed without a significant element of face to face contact with applicants. These have been managed and no application has been presented to Fostering panel for approval without the home of the prospective carer having been seen and assessed.

Electronic Signatures

While these have been used where possible, some carers have found difficulty in the technology. In these cases, foster carer agreement has been recorded by e mail. Carers are being supported in acquiring the necessary IT skills, but this is work in progress.

- **How is Enfield succeeding in comparison to other authorities?**

The impact of Covid on foster carer recruitment has been a national issue with the majority of prospective foster carers who initially expressed interest feeling they should wait until the pandemic was over before progressing their applications. This national picture was reflected in Enfield with fewer approvals being made in the first half of the year. Seven approvals have been made to date in 2020/21 but a further 13 sets of foster carers are currently being assessed and it is anticipated that many of these will be presented to Fostering Panel before the end of the year. This would be outstanding performance in the midst of a pandemic. Any delays will be due to medical assessments and other checks taking longer than usual to arrange. Our target for approvals is 15 each year. In 2019/20, 15 Enfield approvals were made, the highest in any of the North London Consortium boroughs.

(Figures in brackets relate to the previous year 2018-19)

2019-20	Barnet	Camden	Enfield	Hackney	Haringey	Islington
Number of Enquiries	204 (194)	200 (181)	260 (234)	327 (228)	111 (164)	251 (274)
Number of New Approvals	8 (31)	10 (9)	15 (14)	9 (12)	10 (15)	6 (7)

- **What follow up has there been on the fostering report by the scrutiny workstream of 2019?**

Last years report set out a number of next steps which have all been progressed

To assess and recruit 15 sets of foster carers	Completed – 15 sets of carers were approved in 2019/20
To recruit foster carers willing to take sibling groups and older children	Following a targeted recruitment campaign and an increase in the fee for carers taking on second and subsequent children, 9 of the 15 sets of carers approved were for sibling groups and 7 for children up to 18. This is a significant increase on previous years.
To maximise the use of technology in recruiting new carers.	The recruitment strategy sets out the online platforms now used, including Facebook and Twitter. Targeted online events in Foster Care fortnight saw an increase in enquiries from 24 the previous year to 65 in 2020. Portal for online expressions of interest is functioning with 30% of all enquiries coming in through this route
To support the implementation of the North London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)	The RAA is now fully functioning. Links are maintained through membership of the RAA strategic boards by the Enfield Fostering and Permanence Service Manager and the Early Care Planning Manager

Debbie Michael
Service Manager
Fostering & Permanence
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