

1 June 2021		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Corporate Parenting: Fostering Recruitment Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable	
Report of: Naintara Khosla Strategic Lead CLA, Aftercare and Placements		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon Interim Assistant Director Children Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy Corporate Director Childrens Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an outline to the Corporate Parenting Committee of the Fostering Recruitment Strategy. The Fostering Service has, in conjunction with the Communication Service, refreshed the Thurrock Fostering Brand; with the launch of the new brand the marketing strategy has also been updated. This report provides the highlights of the changes and an outline of the events that are planned to create increased opportunities for the recruitment of foster carers.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Members are updated on the Thurrock's Fostering Recruitment Strategy and the brand.**
- 1.2 Note the marketing activities to create opportunities to develop increased recruitment of foster carers.**

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Fostering Recruitment

There is a statutory requirement to ensure there is sufficiency of placements for Thurrock Looked After children. The overall context for meeting the sufficiency duty is set out in the statutory guidance:

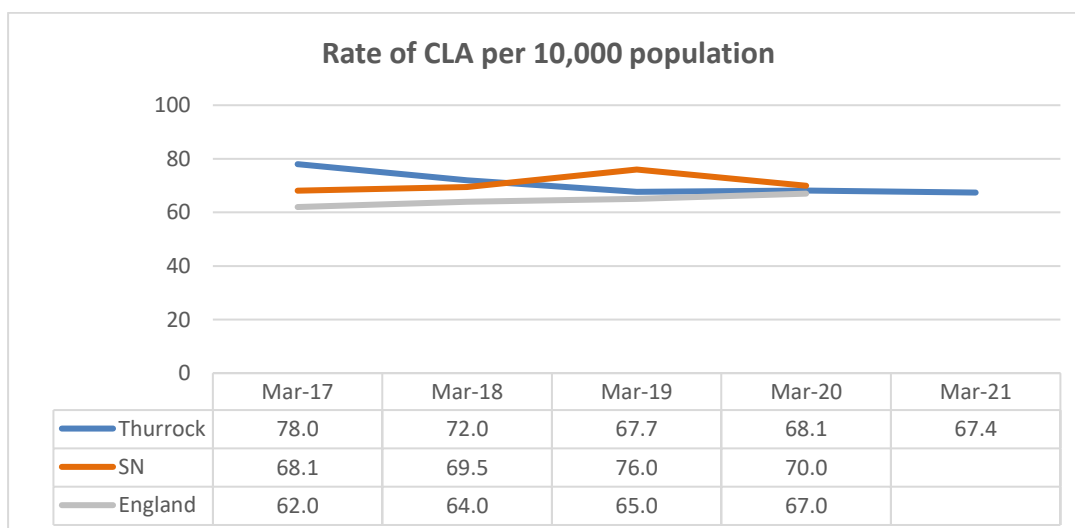
“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of Children Looked After is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical

success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for Children Looked After.”

When a child is unable to live with their birth family there are a range of options that can be considered to meet their needs whilst they are living away from home. This could be to live with foster carers, or reside in the care of family friends or family of the child (these carers are known as ‘connected persons’); live in a residential home or, for some older children over the age of 16 years they are able to live in supported accommodation. The service is dedicated to ensuring children enter into Thurrock’s care only when they need our care and that they are looked after in the right placement. Young people should be able to have secure, stable and settled placements so they can transition into adulthood with the skills to progress to independent living. This report focusses on the approach of Thurrock’s Fostering Service to ensure sufficiency of Thurrock in-house foster carers.

At the end of March 2021 there were 301 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 67.4 per 10,000 of children in Thurrock. Based on benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 70 and in line with the England average of 67. In March 2020 the total number of children in fostering households was 235 (78%); 117 (39%) were being cared for by Independent Fostering Agencies and 118 (39%) were cared for by Thurrock approved Foster Carers. In March 2021 there were 89 Thurrock approved fostering households. The average age of an approved foster carer for Thurrock is 53 years old.

Graph 1 Rate of CLA per 10,000 population



Ethnicity of Children in care and Our Foster Carers

Table 1: Children’s Ethnic Backgrounds:

Ethnicity	Number	%
Any other ethnic group	8	2.7%
Asian or Asian British	9	3.0%
Black or Black British	42	14.1%
Information not yet obtained	4	1.3%
Mixed/Dual background	30	10.1%
White British	205	68.8%

Table 2: Foster Carers Ethnic Background:

Carers by Ethnicity	Number	%
Any other Ethnic Group	0	0.00%
Asian British	2	1.32%
Asian Indian	2	1.32%
Asian Other	0	0.00%
Asian Pakistani	0	0.00%
Black African	5	3.31%
Black British	1	0.66%
Black Caribbean	9	5.96%
White and Black Caribbean	0	0.00%
White British	137	90.73%
White Other	2	1.32%

The data shows that Thurrock’s Foster Carers are less likely to be an ethnic and cultural match for the population of looked after children. We therefore need our marketing and recruitment materials to reflect the diversity of our community and the groups we are seeking to become Thurrock Foster carers.

Recruitment Data

Over the period 2019-2021 recruitment activity has been successful, and the number of children placed with Thurrock Foster Carers remains broadly the same. Table 3 reflects the changes in fostering recruitment and those who are no longer registered as carers.

Table 3 Fostering Recruitment Figures

Financial Year	Fostering Households newly registered	Fostering Households no longer registered
2019/20	19	15
2020/21	11	14

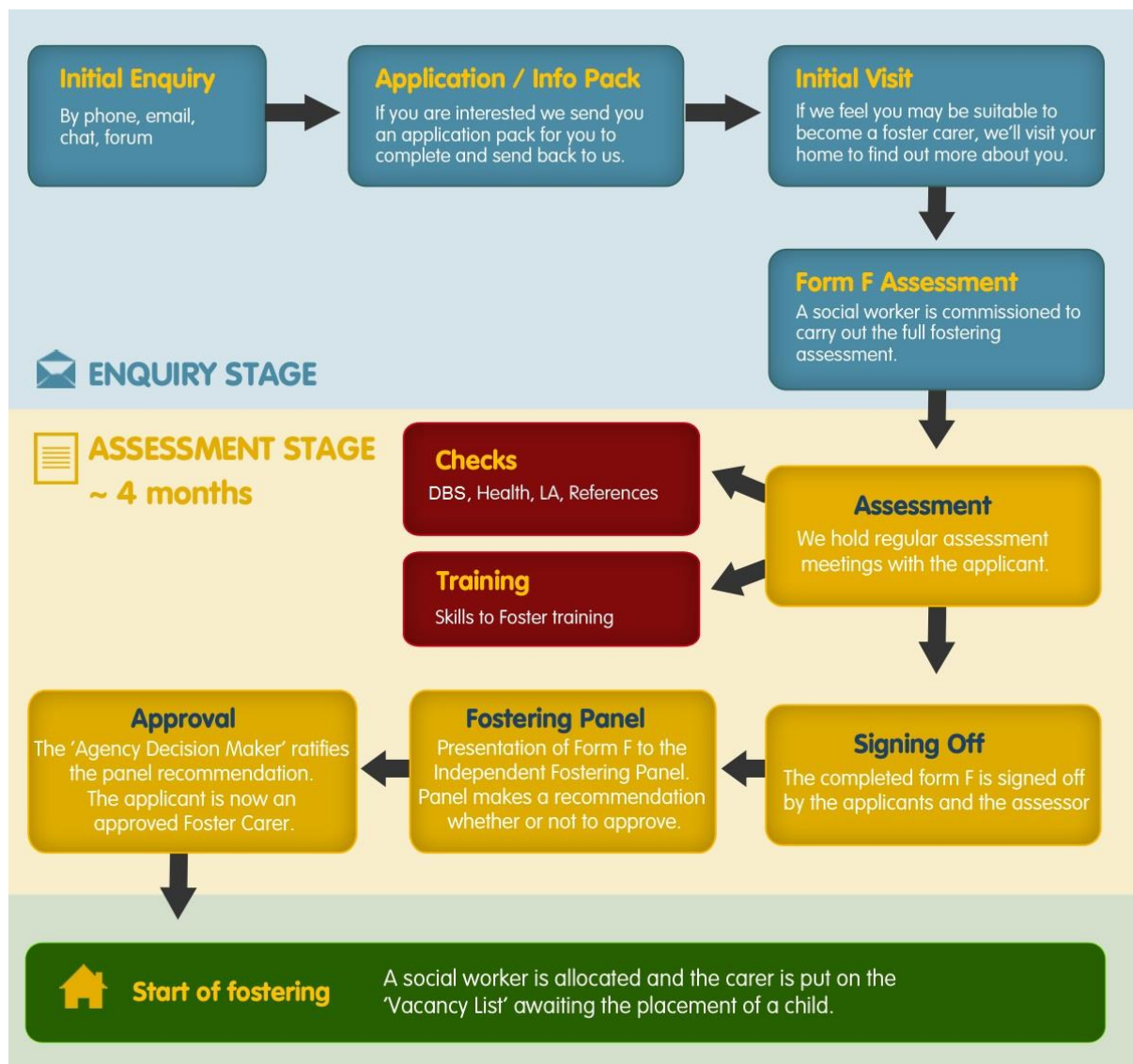
It is natural for some fostering households to retire or decide to end their fostering career depending on changes in their own family circumstances. Of the 14 households that left Thurrock fostering in 2020/21:

- 5 households decided to retire from fostering
- 4 households were de-registered in line with the Fostering Regulations.
- 3 Households moved home, at such a distance they could not continue
- 2 Households resigned due to other changes in their circumstances at home

It is of note that no Thurrock foster carers resigned from Thurrock in order to transfer to another fostering agency. There were 2 transfers from other agencies to Thurrock Fostering. Applicants are assessed against the National Minimum Standards¹ for fostering and their ability to offer a safe, loving home to a child. The recruitment process usually takes about four months from receipt of an application to foster, until approval at Fostering Panel. Timescales are reduced if the applicant is already an approved foster carer from another agency. To approve foster carers a detailed assessment of applicants is undertaken which includes interviews with applicants' personal referees and criminal record checks. Medicals checks are also completed. Applicants who wish to foster are considered from a range of diverse backgrounds.

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

Flowchart Outlining the Process of Thurrock Foster Care Recruitment



In the financial year 2021-2022 the fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase fostering capacity by approximately 20 households and reduce the number of children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA); Thurrock children would benefit from being placed within Thurrock or within 20 miles of their home. A priority for Thurrock fostering recruitment is to focus on recruiting fostering households that will be able to care for brothers and sisters placed together.

The focus on the recruitment of new Thurrock fostering households endeavours to ensure sufficiency given the 19% predicted growth in the population of children and young people in Thurrock by 2024 compared to 13.3% for England.

Table 4 below reflects the high attrition rate at each stage of the fostering recruitment process. There is good attendance at the Information Sessions and the Recruitment Team are completing a significant number of Initial Visits (IVs). There have been 11 approved fostering households (who are able to have up to 15 children if they are siblings) in period April 2020 to March 2021. The disappointing number of new households recruited reflects the impact of COVID 19 during the year, as there has been a reduction in the direct engagement with the public, as well as the inability to plan participation events in the community including festivals and promotional events at Lakeside. The promotional events provide an increase number of enquiries. The 11 approved fostering households were generated from 88 enquiries. Extrapolating this data would indicate that for 22 fostering household approvals there would need to be in excess of 170 enquiries.

The new brand and enhanced media campaign will promote Thurrock fostering and should increase enquiries, attendance at the information sessions and also the IVs. This should, in turn, generate an increase in the numbers of Thurrock approved fostering households. The Service are monitoring the recruitment activity to understand the impact of the new brand and ensure the marketing approach is effective.

**Table 4
Recruitment Key Performance Indicators for Fostering Recruitment**

Applications	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
Number of households attending Information Sessions	N/A	N/A	5	0	3	5	0	3	2	8	5	8	39
Number of Enquiries	34	14	12	12	12	19	9	17	8	15	15	21	88
Number of IVs completed	17	6	5	2	7	5	4	3	7	4	6	8	74
Number of Applications Received	4	4	3	3	2	1	0	5	2	0	4	3	31
Number of applications dropped out	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	3	0	1	1	0	10
Numbers of approved foster carers	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	11

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Fostering Brand



The Thurrock Fostering Service has developed a new brand which is known and identifiable as specific to Thurrock Fostering. The brand promotes inclusivity and diversity utilising a multi-coloured brand which is symbolic of rainbow for LGBTQT and NHS England, it is hoped this will appeal to all sections of the community and encourage recruitment from across the Borough. The Service particularly welcomes applications from residents in the Borough but is also seeking to support carers from other areas to join Thurrock's fostering community. The launch of the new brand has been developed to coincide with the Council Tax rebate offer to Thurrock foster carers. Council Tax rebate has provided Thurrock with a competitive offer for carers and a marketing edge to the offers available from other fostering providers.

To enhance the marketing of the new brand the fostering recruitment team along with colleagues from Communications Department have ensured there has been relentless promotion of the new brand. This has included a new look fostering section on the Thurrock Council website² providing easy access to the fostering section of the website. The Registration of Interest forms have also been reviewed and this is twinned with the dates for the information sessions. Whilst COVID 19 has impacted on the ability of the fostering recruitment team to be community based impacting on the number of new foster carers; there has been the opportunity to utilise the online approach. This has reflected a slow increase in attendance at information sessions that

² <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering>

are being held online. This trend is being monitored to understand if this is a preference for those wishing to become foster carers.

Future marketing opportunities include expanding the use of the internet; COVID 19 has increased the use of online information as a preferred means of communication. Information sessions have increased to twice a month. The launch of the new brand has also seen the promotion of Thurrock fostering recruitment on social media, Facebook, Council Twitter feed and Spotify. The recruitment team have also continued the use of Thurrock's fostering hashtag #makeadifference.

The Fostering Recruitment Service have been exploring the use of online news feeds to advertise, both in Essex and other newsfeeds for nearby, surrounding areas. Consideration has also been given to including the fostering recruitment offer on the Thurrock internet jobs page, however staff remain responsive to telephone enquiries. This increased use of online marketing opportunities is twinned with the use of Radio adverts. Consideration has been given to further marketing opportunities as we emerge out of lockdown, these include the use of Bus Shelters and Roundabouts to continue the increased awareness of the brand.

There will be continuous review of the marketing opportunities with the ongoing recruitment planning meetings which are held monthly with Communications colleagues. These meetings monitor Performance Indicators and the work to promote and build the brand and the effectiveness of marketing. There is a fostering recruitment action plan with a calendar of key events, and dates for advertising are planned in advance. This includes Fostering Fortnight which is a national campaign led by The Fostering Network; this year it runs from 10th – 23rd May and the theme is #whywecare highlighting how foster carers can transform young lives. Foster Care Fortnight receives around 900 pieces of media coverage each year and Thurrock implements a media plan before and throughout the event

Participation and Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Foster Care Association

The new Thurrock Fostering Brand has been shared with the CiCC and the Thurrock Foster Care Association and they have been positive about the new images which promotes an inclusive approach.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members to consider and note the options available.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 There is consultation with Children in Care Council who meet monthly; Foster Care Association, care experienced young people and Inspire.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead, Finance

The increased recruitment of foster carers will assist in the reduction of Independent Fostering Agencies and support the Council providing children who are looked after with increased choice as the cohort of Thurrock foster carers grows.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Education and Social Care)

The Council has a duty under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 to take such steps, so far as reasonably practicable, to provide looked after children with accommodation in the area which meets the needs of those children. The Council must have regard to, in meeting this duty, the benefit of having a sufficient number and range of providers in the area.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer Adults, Housing & Health

The refreshed branding and marketing strategy is designed to attract and recruit foster carers from a wide range of diverse backgrounds. This will ensure there are a range of care options for children and young people and provide increased opportunities so they can be placed in culturally matched families. The updated fostering brand has created a more inclusive image and ensures that fostering recruitment has a greater reach to a broad range of communities.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

The fostering recruitment is crucial for looked after children to support their placement choice, remaining in their own communities, near their families and supports maintaining consistency with local education attendance.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Not Applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Not Applicable

Report Authors:

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