

6 December 2017		ITEM: 10
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Annual Fostering Report April 2016 – March 2017		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Andrews Osei, Service Manager, Family Placements		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

2016/2017 has been a transitional year for the Fostering Service. It is the year that the Fostering, Placement, Adoption and Children Contact Centre were redesigned as a one-hub Family Placement Service. It is also the year that the Fostering Recruitment and Support Services in collaboration with IMPOWER reviewed and realigned the activities of teams and designed a strategy to increase in house foster carers as well as expand carers placement capacity.

There has been a change in the leadership and management of the service. A new service manager joined Thurrock on 01/03/2016 to take the lead for Fostering, Adoption, Placement and Resources. A new Team Manager was appointed in February 2016. Special Guardianship Assessments has been restructured and centralised under a Recruitment and Assessment Team Manager. During these changes, the fostering service focussed on its core business of maintaining existing carers as well as increasing the foster carer’s numbers and capacity.

The redesign and additional responsibility relating to Special Guardianships has resulted in change of the names of the various teams in fostering. The Fostering Support Team is now Placement Support and Fostering Recruitment Team has been renamed Placement Recruitment and Assessment Team. These changes will ensure effective communication with stake holders including foster carers, staff and service

users that the team's core function covers all forms of family placement arrangements.

Overall, 10 new carers were approved April - March 2016/2017 and four carers left due to resignations and retirements (net gain of 6). 11 Temporary Approvals were live and ongoing as at 31/03/2017. A total of 64 SGOs were allocated (64 households) 53 were filed to court and 11 are ongoing. From the 53 households filed to court 23 household (39 children) were granted Special Guardianship Orders.

A total of 163 children were living in Thurrock's in-house Family Placement provisions as at 31/03/2017. Of the total number, 130 were in a fostering provision and 33 new Special Guardianship Orders were granted by the courts. 7 young adults (18 years +) were staying with their foster carers under staying put arrangement.

There are clear plans to strengthen the gains made and to take full advantage of IMPOWER and the Recruitment Team's joint strategy to encourage more people to become Thurrock foster carers. We have established project groups jointly led and run by foster carers and supervising social workers in three key areas, namely; recruitment campaigns, assessment process and foster carer's support to ensure better systems are in place to attract and retain good foster carers.

According to Fostering Network figures (205/16), the overall national context for fostering services is that, there is a deficit in the number of foster carers that are needed to provide placement and placement choice for Children Looked After. Going by our current placement trend, the service is working with stakeholders to achieve a net increase of 45 additional carers within the next 3 years so that Thurrock can offer up to 80% of children within our in-house fostering provision. (Refer to Recruitment / Sufficiency Strategy for specific details)

2016/17 also saw a continued focus in providing the best support, training and development for Thurrock foster carers. A new therapeutic therapist joined the service to provide clinical supervision and support to carers with complex and difficult placements. The therapist is providing clinical supervision and support to carers with complex and difficult placements. Consultation meetings also take place for supervising social workers and social workers in order to understand and develop appropriate methods to meet the children's needs and to stabilise placements.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Corporate Parenting Committee note the report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Fostering Service is registered and regulated by Ofsted. The service's activity complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 & 2013, National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011, Children Act 1989, and Guidance and Regulations Volume 4:

3. Description of the service

- 3.1 The Family Placement Service is responsible for the strategic operational management of all types of care placements and resources for Thurrock Children Services.
- 3.2 The managers of the teams across the service are; Adina Stefoni, Carole Parker, Julia Sutton and Vivien Keirle; they are all permanent members of staff. Adina is responsible for Placement Support and Carole is responsible for Placement Referrals. Julia and Vivien are responsible for Assessments and Children Contacts respectively.
- 3.3 The Family Placement Service has 28 staff.
- 3.4 Children are at the heart of everything we do. Thurrock Family Placement Service is a listening and learning service and therefore takes full responsibility and ownership of concerns and complaints from children, carers, staff and all stake holders and work hard to improve on outcomes and quality of care for children and young people.
- 3.5 Our philosophy is that children in foster care must experience good quality of normal family life by integrating with loving foster families who are able to make everyday decisions as they would do for their own children.
- 3.6 Thurrock fostering service support children to develop their own identities and aspirations to fulfil their potential. We encourage children to take advantage of every opportunity to promote their talents and skills.
- 3.7 We are committed to continuous improvement in our standards and service provision. We therefore promote a culture of learning and development by listening and taking regular feedback from children, stakeholders, partners, foster carers and prospective carers.

4. Local Context

- 4.1 The core activity of the Family Placement Service is to provide suitable placements for children in care. The management of foster placements is a key responsibility of a team of social workers in the Family Placement Service.
- 4.2 There are eight (8) supervising social worker positions in the Support Team. The core duty of each supervising social worker is to hold purposeful meetings with the foster carers including at least one unannounced visit a year. The objectives of the meetings are to support, supervise and ensure that foster carers are meeting the needs of children, taking into account each child's wishes and feelings. The supervision meeting is also a framework to assess foster carers' performance and develop their competencies and skills.
- 4.3 There are six (6) social workers in the Assessment Team. This is complemented with one (1) recruitment officer and one (1) foster carers

annual reviewing officer. The core duty of the Assessment Team is to recruit, prepare and assess prospective carers and special guardians.

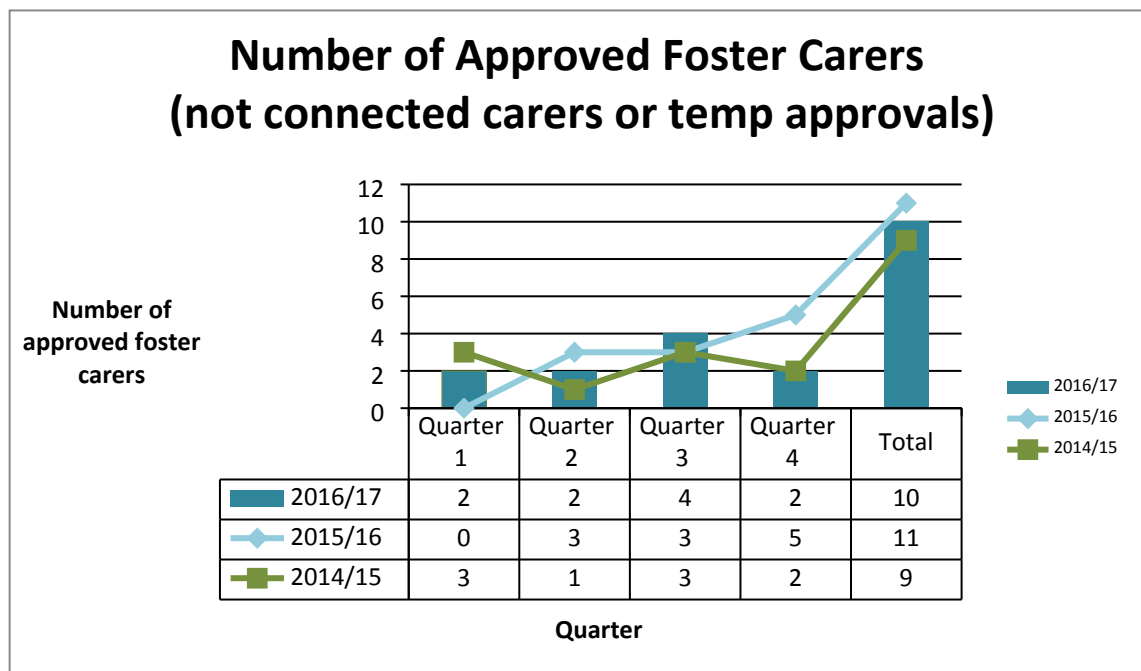
- 4.4 The Referral Team has one senior social worker complimenting the manager to search for and, in collaboration with the Support Team, match children with suitable carers.
- 4.5 The Family Contact Centre (OAK Tree) is well managed and supported by an experienced social work manager and well trained contact supervisors. The Centre delivers core Family Contact functions. OAK Tree is currently the hub delivering all contacts and support services including post adoption/ SGO Letter box Contact either in-house or through partnership with private providers. Staff at the Centre provides exceptionally professional service to preserve a child's sense of origin, keeping open the possibility of family relationships later in life and by providing reassurance for the child, reducing anxiety and fear of rejection to improve placement stability.
- 4.6 All posts in the Family Placement Service are occupied by permanent staff. This provides the stability and continuity for the growth and development of the service. The current staff to carer ratio is 1:16. The average case load is currently 1:13 carers; however, there are occasional increases due to approval (Reg: 24) of family members and friends to care for children removed from their parents' care. There are six permanent assessing social workers responsible for mainstream, connected and special guardianship assessments.
- 4.7 The service has improved partnership with foster carers by listening and hearing their views and incorporating their suggestions in the overall delivery of fostering services. Foster carers are consulted and involved in the recruitment and retention strategy. A number of methods are used to solicit feedback from carers. They include; annual feedback questionnaire, open discussions at fosters carers forum, joint committee meetings and direct representation from the foster carers association (The One Team).
- 4.8 We have exceeded our agreed targets for recruiting new carers and increasing the use of in-house placements by 20% from 85 placements to 102 placements. The usage of In house placement capacity increased over 38% to 117 placements in 2016/17.
- 4.9 There remains a surplus of carers for younger children (under 5) due to our own in-house capacity and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Essex Fostering. This means we have achieved the sufficiency required for 'Baby only' carers therefore are no longer recruiting carers without a spare bedroom into that category.
- 4.10 The highest demand and shortage of carers is for teenagers and large sibling groups. The authority therefore stopped generic recruitment in 2016/17 and targeted recruitment of carers for teenagers and sibling placements.

- 4.11 Work undertaken with iMPOWER has assisted the service to strengthen and focus our recruitment strategy. Our current strategy is based on a clear market analysis of the potential pool of carers within Thurrock and what is likely to motivate them to foster.
- 4.12 Placements are made appropriately with careful matching both in-house and with IFA carers. There has been a marked reduction in the rate of placement breakdowns within in-house placements and this is seen as a direct result of pro-active support and training for foster carers. We have moved away from 'disruption' meetings with a focus on 'placement stability' meetings and promoting placement stability. The increase in our long term stability rate from 63% (2015/16) to 72% currently is seen as an indicator of initial success in this area.
- 4.13 Feedback about the fostering service from carers is positive and effective consultation with carers and the fostering association has seen an increase in foster carers willing to consider Staying Put arrangements.

5. Assessment and Approvals 3 Years Average

The service has added 10 new fostering households to its mainstream carers in 2016/2017. The trend of recruitments for the last 3 years as highlighted below shows that the service has struggled to recruit more main stream carers. It is therefore anticipated that the revised [iMPOWER] strategy will address the shortfalls. It is forecasted that between 18 and 25 new carers will be approved 2017/18.

**Table 1 / Graph 1 (4.1)
Approved Foster Carers (Quarterly) / 3 years progress**



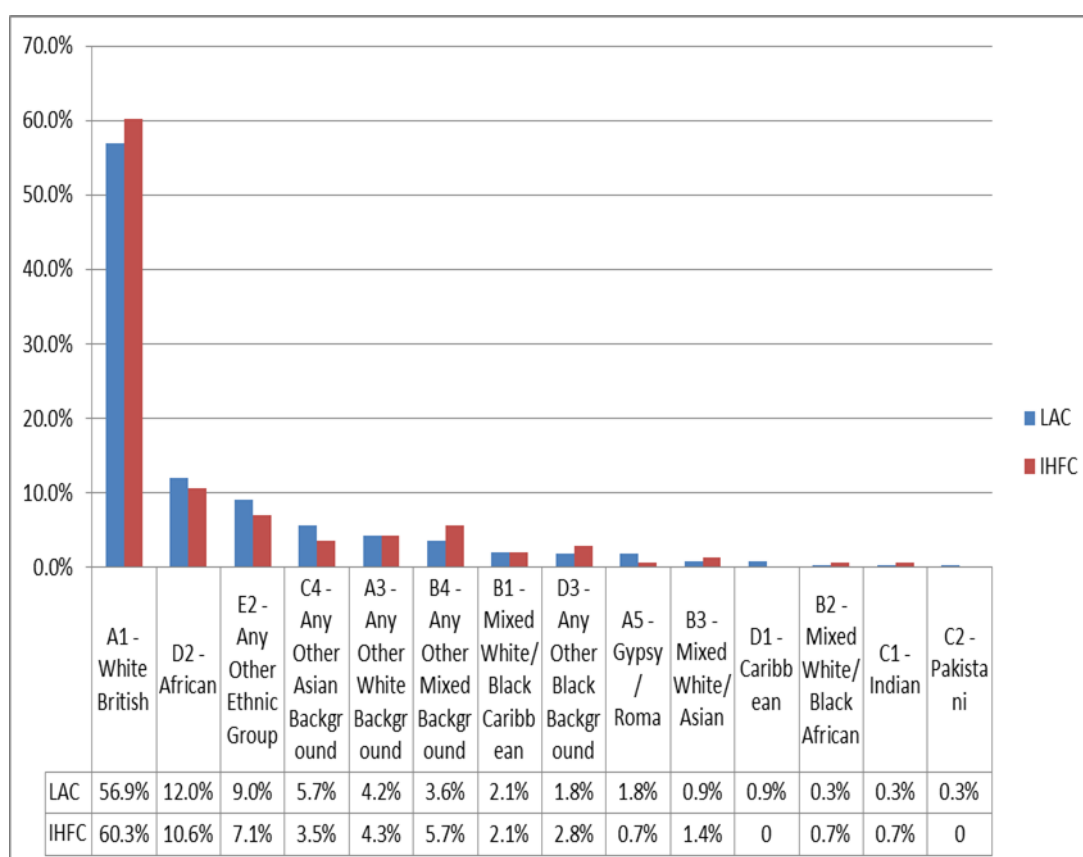
6. Foster Carers

- 6.1 As of 1st April 2017, there were 158 active carers from 92 households. Out of the total number, there were 129 mainstream carers from 75 fostering households and 12 Family and Friends Carers from 6 Connected Carer Households. A total of 17 Temporary Approvals, of 11 households were ongoing as at 01/04/2017. The table below provide detailed breakdown of the full composition of Thurrock carers.
- 6.2 As of 01/04/17 there were 7 approved foster carers from 4 households that were inactive (on 'hold' - offering no placement opportunity) for various reasons including change of circumstance, sickness, break from fostering.
- 6.3 The diversity of the Thurrock carer population is essential to meet the needs of children who are and who may become looked after in Thurrock.

Table 2 (6.1) Ethnicity of Individual foster carers (Not Households)

	Foster Carers	Connect. People	Temp Approval	Total	%
White British	110	6	16	132	83.5%
White Irish	2			2	1.3%
White Other	4	2		6	3.8%
White & Black Caribbean	1			1	0.6%
Asian		2		2	1.3%
Caribbean	7			7	4.4%
African	4	2	1	7	4.4%
Other	1			1	0.6%

Looked-After Children & Ethnicity of In-House Fostering Households



7. Placements

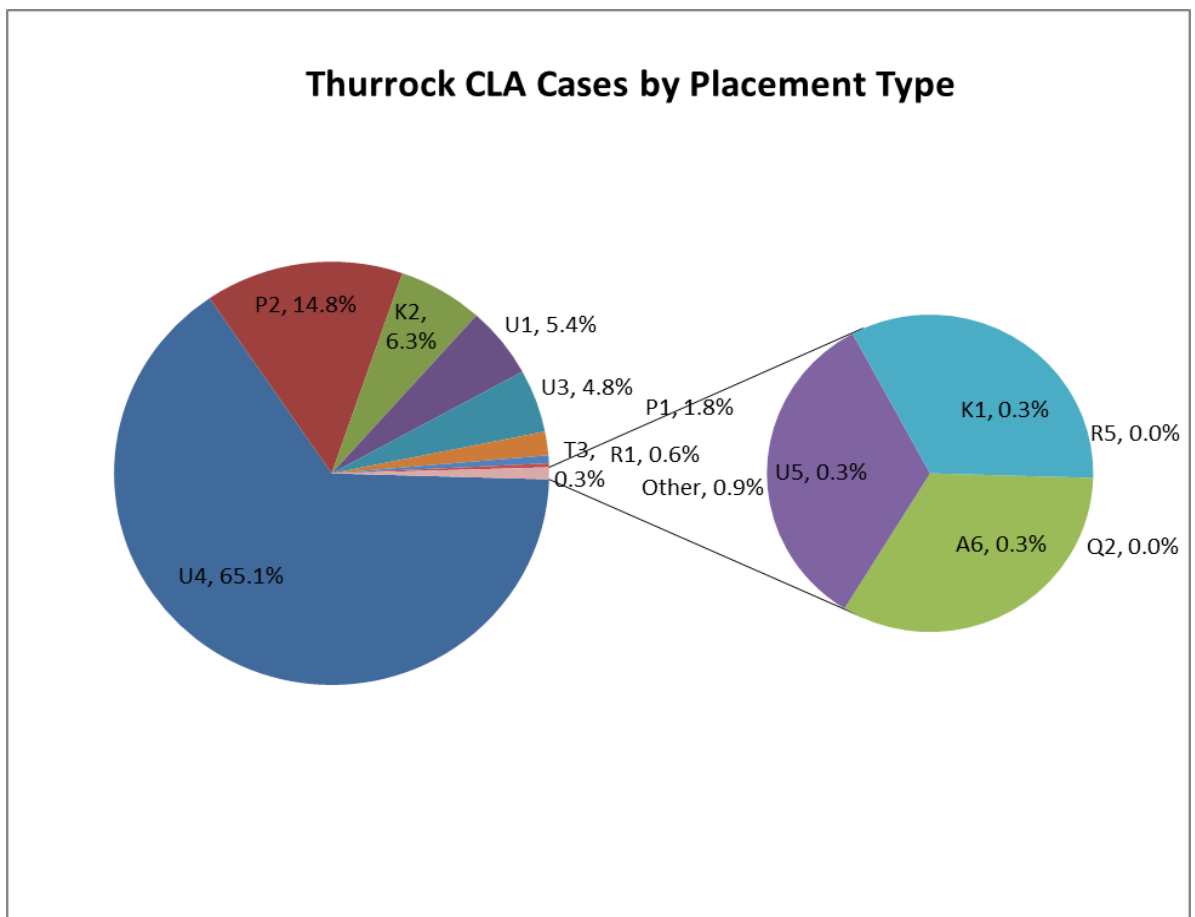
- 7.1 At 31st March 2017 there were 332 children in care and 251 living in foster care – representing 76% of Children in Care. Of the 251 children living in foster care on the 31st March 2017, 51.8% (130) lived with Thurrock In-House Foster Carers whilst 113, representing 45%, resided with Independent Foster Carers (IFAs). 8 (3.2%) were in Voluntary or Third Sector provision.
- 7.2 The service exceeded the target of placing 50% of children in fostering placement with in-house foster carer in 2016/17 financial year. The significant gain was as result of good and creative use of family and friend carers (connected) in accordance with Regulation 24 of Care Planning regulations.
- 7.3 The migrant crises in Europe in 2016 also contributed to high proportion of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) arriving in Thurrock and becoming accommodated as Looked-After Children.

Trend analysis placements

Chart 1: Look After Children and Placements: 2016/2017

Placement Type	Children	Percentage
U4 Foster placement	216	63.9%
P2 Independent living	49	14.8%

K2 Children's Homes	21	6.3%
U1 Connected Person	18	5.1%
U3 Reg: 24	16	4.8%
P1 Placed with own parents	6	1.8%
R1 Residential Care Home (Reg Homes Act 1984)	2	0.9%
R3 Family Centre / Mother and Baby Unit	1	0.6%
A6 Adoption (S21) - not with current foster carer	1	0.6%
U5 Foster placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter:	1	0.3%
K1 Secure unit	1	0.3%
R5	0	0.0%
Q2	0	0.0%
	332	



**Chart 2: In- House Placements Vrs Independent Fostering Agency
2016/17**

PP CODE				
PR4 - Private Provision	113	45.0%		
PR1 - Own provision by LA	114	45.4%		
PR2 - Other LA provision	16	6.4%	51.8%	130
PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	8	3.2%		
	<u>251</u>			

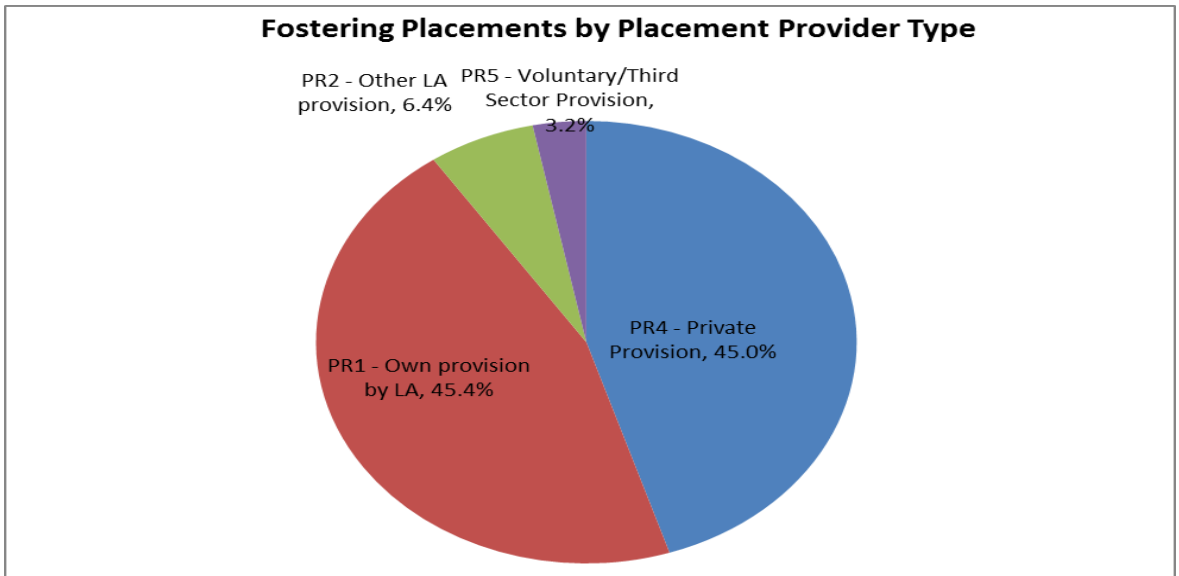


Chart 3: Age Distribution of Looked After Children and Placements 2016/17

Age P'pulation

Age	P'pulation				%			
	LAC	FOSTERED LA	LA	PRIVATE	LAC	FOSTERE LA	LA	PRIVATE
0	13	11	8	3	3.9%	4.4%	6.2%	2.7%
1	7	6	3	3	2.1%	2.4%	2.3%	2.7%
2	7	7	6	1	2.1%	2.8%	4.6%	0.9%
3	3	3	2	1	0.9%	1.2%	1.5%	0.9%
4	5	5	3	2	1.5%	2.0%	2.3%	1.8%
5	5	5	3	2	1.5%	2.0%	2.3%	1.8%
6	7	7	7		2.1%	2.8%	5.4%	0.0%
7	10	8	3	5	3.0%	3.2%	2.3%	4.4%
8	17	14	8	5	5.1%	5.6%	6.2%	4.4%
9	13	13	8	3	3.9%	5.2%	6.2%	2.7%
10	17	15	6	9	5.1%	6.0%	4.6%	8.0%
11	21	15	9	5	6.3%	6.0%	6.9%	4.4%
12	20	18	10	8	6.0%	7.2%	7.7%	7.1%
13	21	21	14	7	6.3%	8.4%	10.8%	6.2%
14	25	22	10	12	7.5%	8.8%	7.7%	10.6%
15	31	26	10	15	9.3%	10.4%	7.7%	13.3%
16	44	34	12	21	13.3%	13.5%	9.2%	18.6%
17	66	21	8	11	19.9%	8.4%	6.2%	9.7%
	332	251	130	113	1	1	1	1

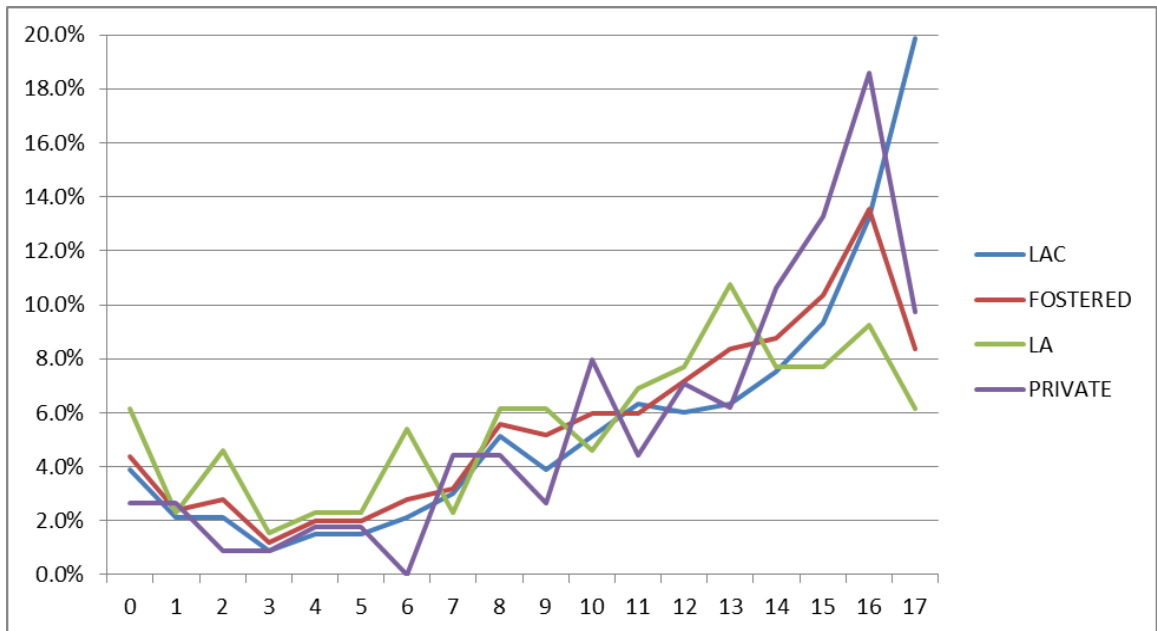


Chart 4: Independent Fostering Agency Placements Trend From 2014 – 2017

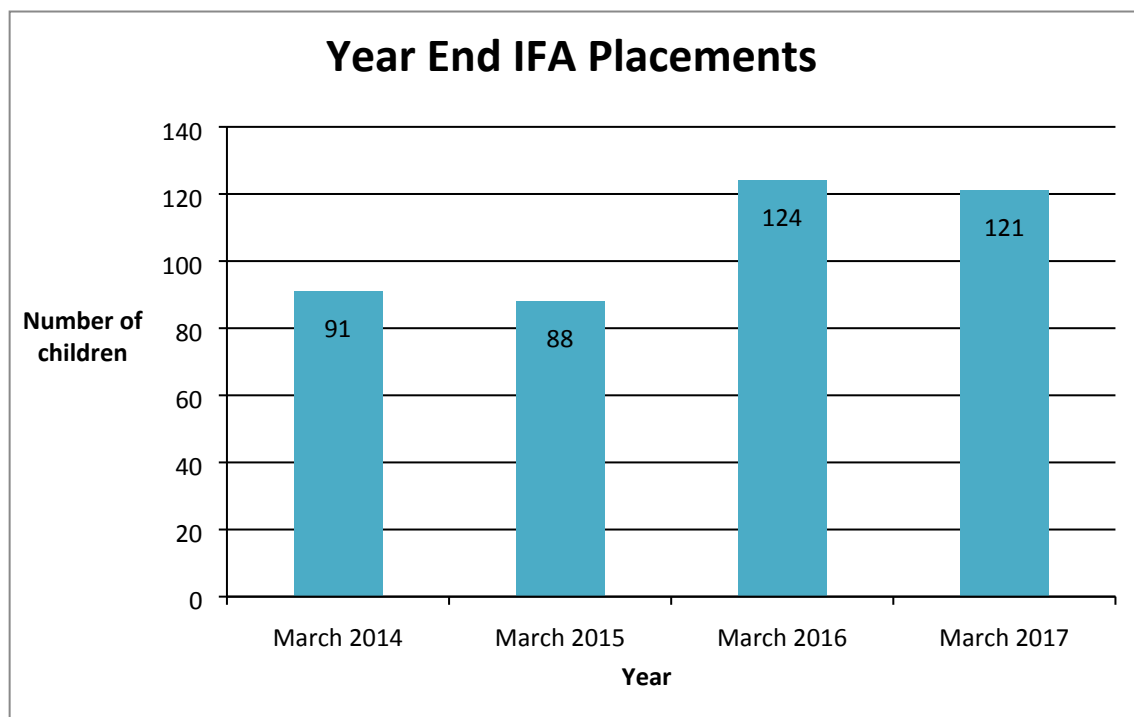
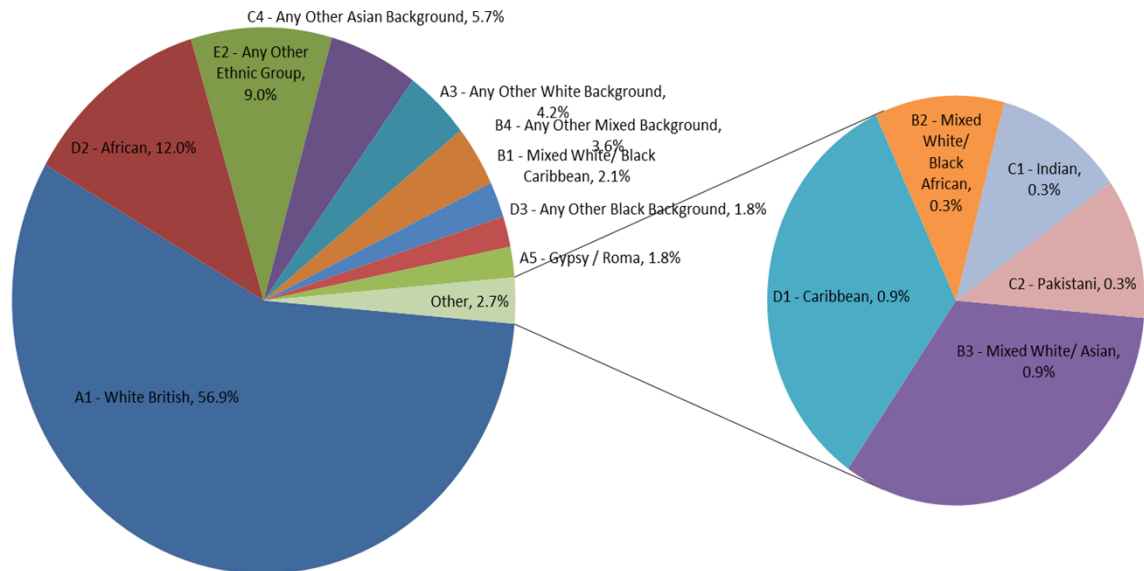


Chart 5: Ethnic representation of LAC as at 31/03/2017

Ethnicity	Number	%
A1 - White British	189	56.90%
D2 - African	40	12.00%
E2 - Any Other Ethnic Group	30	9.00%
C4 - Any Other Asian Background	19	5.70%
A3 - Any Other White Background	14	4.20%
B4 - Any Other Mixed Background	12	3.60%
B1 - Mixed White/ Black Caribbean	7	2.10%
D3 - Any Other Black Background	6	1.80%
A5 - Gypsy / Roma	6	1.80%
B3 - Mixed White/ Asian	3	0.90%
D1 - Caribbean	3	0.90%
B2 - Mixed White/ Black African	1	0.30%
C1 - Indian	1	0.30%
C2 - Pakistani	1	0.30%

332



8. Fostering Approval Terminations

8.1 Four carers have left for various reasons in 2016/17 financial year

- 1 - Deregistered for safeguarding reasons
- 3 - Resigned citing retirement

9. Foster Placements and Services Provided

The fostering teams provide a range of services including:

- 9.1 **Permanent and long-term foster carers:** make a commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach adult life
- 9.2 **Short term foster carers:** which include placements where the plan is for a child to return home or move to an alternative permanent placement.
- 9.3 **Remand foster carers:** who offer placements to young people who have been remanded to the care of the local authority by the courts.
- 9.4 **Family and Friends carers:** foster carers approved to look after a specific child or children. These carers are family members or friends who knew a child or children before they came into the care system.
- 9.5 **Short Break carers:** are being recruited in line with the aiming high agenda to provide short breaks for children.
- 9.6 **Parent and Child carers:** who offer fostering placement to support or assess parental capacity of birth parents as directed by Court or following recommendations of assessments.

10. Foster Carers Recruitment Activities

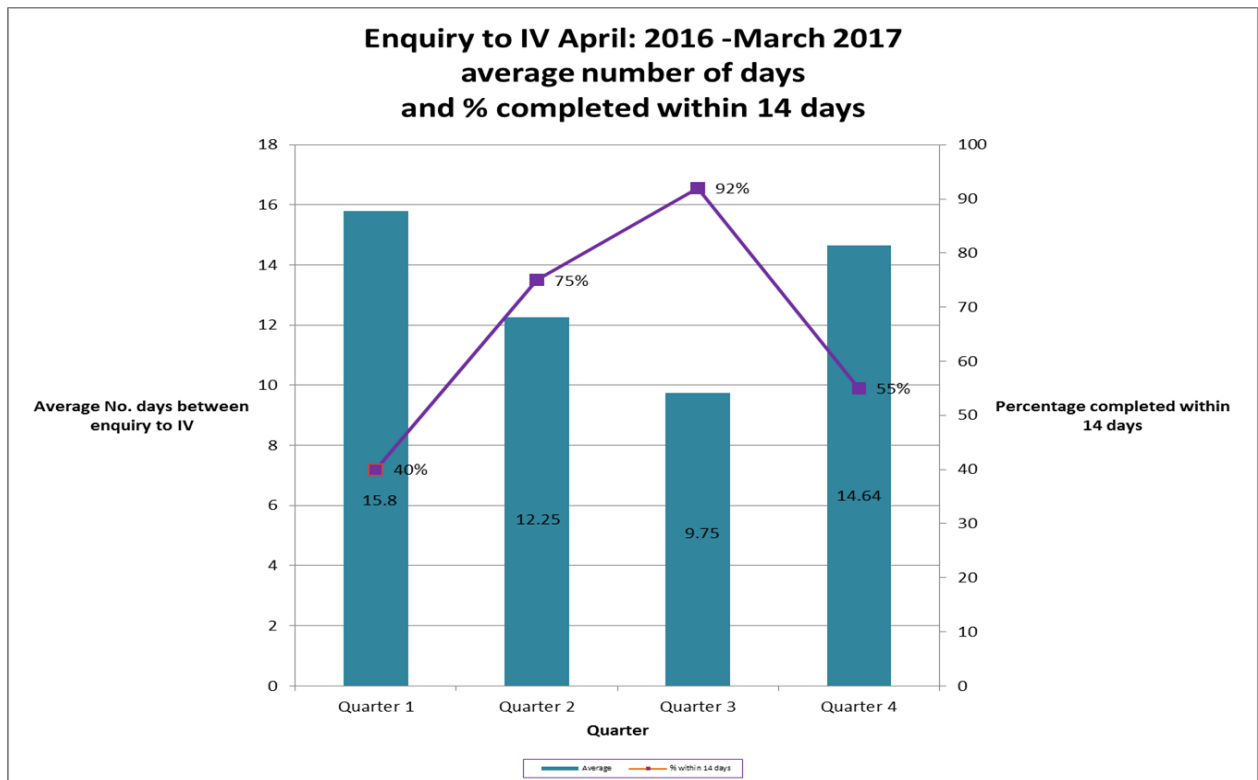
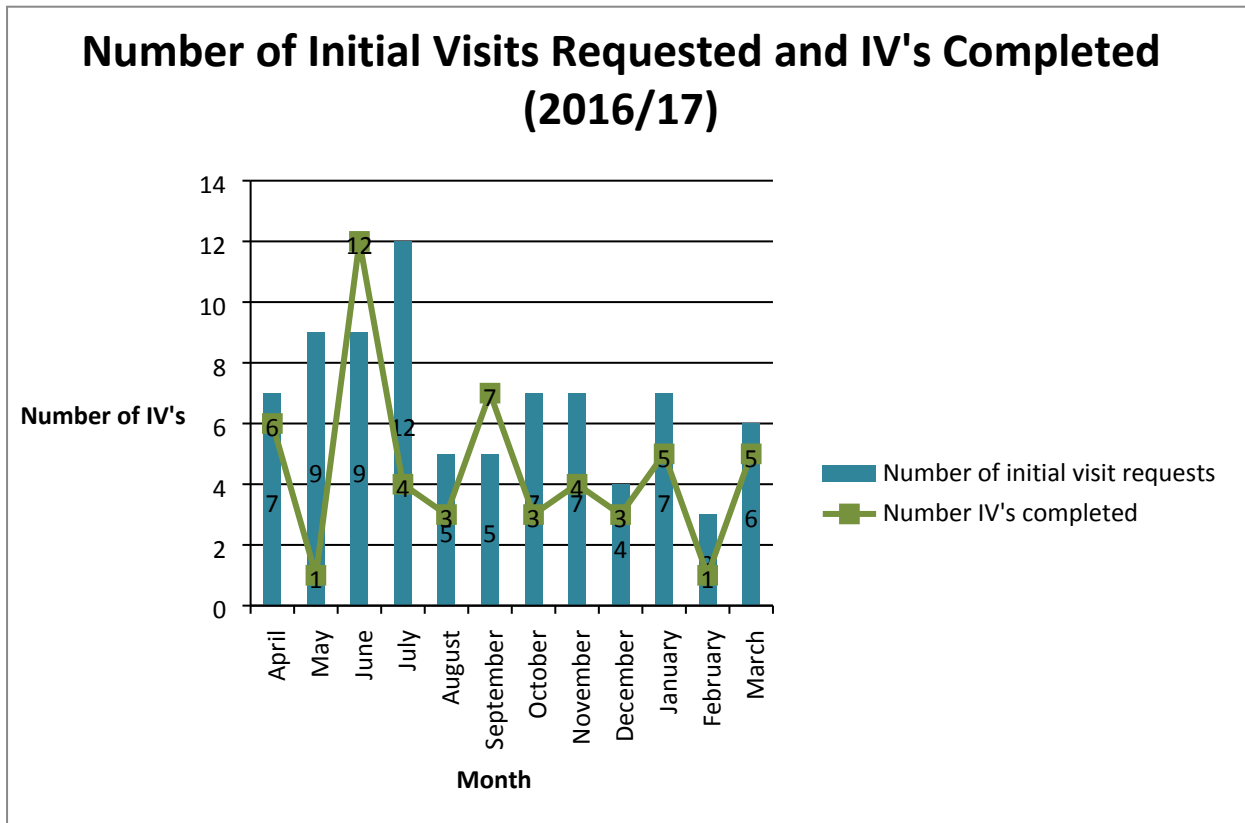
- 10.1 The Fostering Service has used a variety of mediums to recruit a wide spectrum of Foster Carers. The Fostering Recruitment strategy 2016/17 focused on increasing the number of applications and the timeliness of our response to fostering enquiries.
- 10.2 From data analysis it is apparent that potential applicants mainly enquire online with 48 % of all enquiries coming via this route, this is compared with 21% of enquiries coming via telephone and 31% of enquirers having attended a drop in or fostering event.
- 10.3 Conversely, the highest single advertising medium recorded was the Thurrock Gazette (11%) however, 51% of enquiries state that they have not seen any advertising. As this is such a large proportion, it is difficult to know if this is actually the case, especially as most of these applications do not proceed further in the process so there is no opportunity to explore this.
- 10.4 There is also evidence that most applications from internet searches do not progress to assessment due to lack of information and understanding of the processes and requirements. As a result, dedicated fostering portals have been developed with clear and specific information to help prospective applicants make informed decisions. We aim to fully utilise the advantages of all forms of digital media to attract new applicants. Detailed analysis of the Fostering Recruitment activities may be accessed from appendix 1 of this report.

10.5 Timeliness of the application Process

- 10.6 The 2013 fostering regulation in relation to Stage1 and Stage 2 assessment process is fully complied with. Stage 1 of the assessment process is intended to provide basic information about the applicant to enable clearly unsuitable applicants to be sifted out without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource by the fostering service or the applicant. This has contributed to robust screening process also initial enquirers getting a better understanding of the profession of fostering.

Where the Stage 1 information has been obtained, and no notification has been given within 10 working days that the applicant is not suitable to be a foster, Stage 2 process which include information relating to the applicant and other members of the household, together with any other relevant information commences. This clarity of process has contributed in tackling delays and ensured that assessments are completed within 16 weeks from date of first contact. Out the 10 approvals, 50% (5) of the applicants were approved within 12 weeks from the date of application and 5 approved between 14 and 16 weeks.

Chart 6: Applicant Enquiry to Initial Visit (2016/17)



10.7 Preparing Fostering Applicants

10.8 Fostering applicants are expected to attend a three day or six evenings Skills to Foster Training course as part of their full assessment. Skills to Foster preparation sessions are run on a regular basis by the fostering service (social worker) and foster carer. All training events are co-facilitated with an approved foster carer and feedback from prospective applicants confirms this is highly valued.

11. Fostering Reports

11.1 All Social work practitioners in the recruitment and assessment teams have attended 'Making Good Assessments' training and workshops.

11.2 The Fostering Panel Advisor quality assures all assessments that are submitted to the fostering panel. Every effort is made to ensure that applicants are presented to Panel within statutory timescales.

11.3 Panel members complete feedback form on each application. Feedback from the Panel Membership is indicative that the quality of assessments, analysis and general standard of the report has significantly improved. The service is using the current Coram-BAAF assessment template for fostering and connected person's assessments.

12. Fostering Panel

12.1 The Fostering Panel is supported by the Agency Advisor and is chaired independently. The membership is diverse with specialisms in health and education and social work. Other panel members include the Lead Member for Children's Services, a previous foster carer and two people who were fostered as children.

12.2 The panel considers all prospective assessments, foster carers' reviews and termination of approvals. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who is currently the Assistant Director of Children Social Care Services.

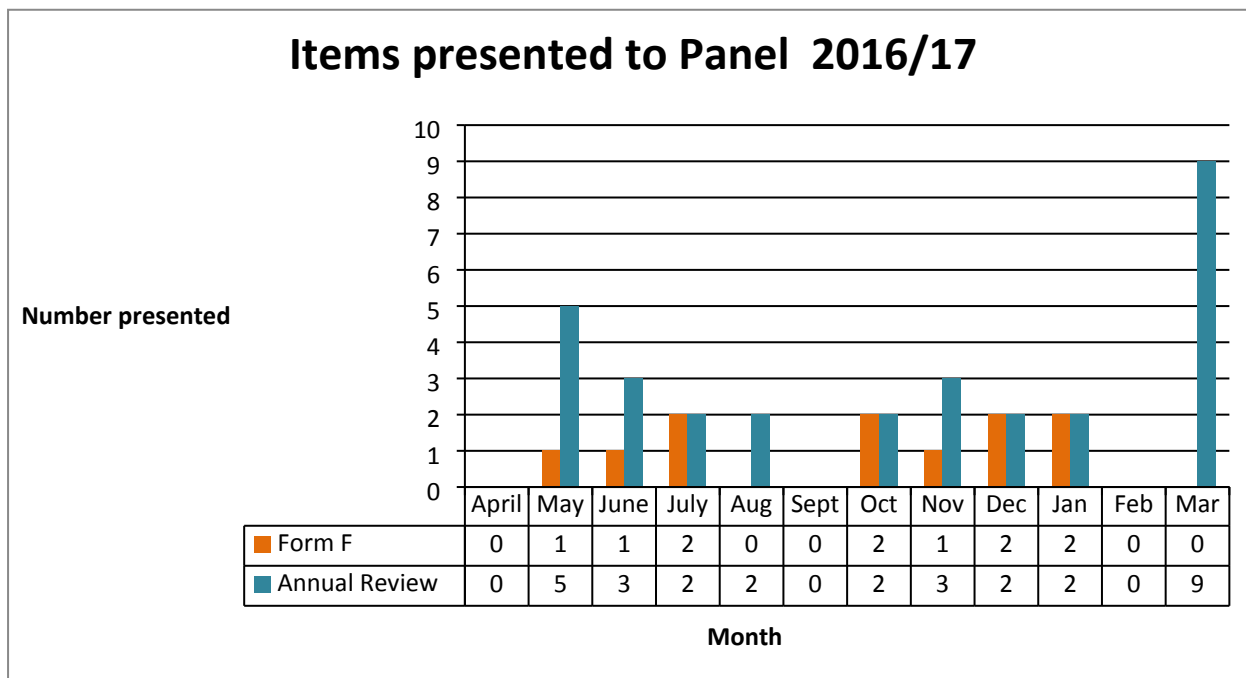
12.3 There were 11 new applications presented to the fostering panel. 10 of them were recommended for approval, one required a further reference from ex-employer before a recommendation for approval.

12.4 Panel Meetings are held once every month. The nature of panel businesses and agendas are determined two weeks before meeting. There are occasion where the business of panel require two meetings in a month.

12.5 There were 30 annual reviews considered by the panel from April 2016 to March 2017 of which 29 were recommended re-approved. One carer was deregistered and received a qualified determination but the applicants did not pursue the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) process and Agency Decision Maker accordingly deregistered the applicant after 28 days qualifying

determination notice lapsed. The IRM process is an independent review of the qualifying determination where a fostering service provider proposes not to approve prospective foster carers or to withdraw or change the terms of an existing foster carer's approval.

Chart 13 (12.3) Cases presented to Panel 2016/17



12.6 The Panel's Quality Assurance Role

12.7 The Fostering Panel performs its quality assurance role by providing regular feedback to the service. A joint meeting between the management of Family Placement and Panel members is held quarterly to discuss practice and strategic issues.

12.8 Feedback from applicants who attended panel was generally positive. For example, members were complimentary about the thoroughness of annual foster carers reviews presented to panel.

12.9 All panel members receive annual appraisal and this is undertaken jointly by the Fostering Panel Chair and Fostering Panel Advisor. The Fostering Panel Chair's annual appraisal is undertaken by the Agency Decision Maker of the Fostering Service.

12.10 New Fostering applicants who were approved by the Agency Decision Maker were informed in writing within 5 working days.

13. Support for Foster Carers

13.1 Foster carers receive monthly (4 weekly) visits from a supervising social worker. The allocated worker is aware of the demands of each placement and is available to offer support via the telephone or by home visits. Supervising

social workers continuously assess the needs of the individual carers and identifies additional support and training to enhance the quality of their care.

- 13.2 The Fostering out of hours duty phone (OOH) offers a service outside of the normal working hours ensuring that social worker support is provided until 10.30pm each day. After 10.30pm foster carers can gain social work support from the Emergency Duty social worker.
- 13.3 Competitive financial support is offered to reflect the value Thurrock places on foster carers. Additional competency allowance is paid to carers in recognition of their training and skills in managing difficult placements.
- 13.4 Clinical supervision is offered to foster carers from an experienced therapist. The clinical support is bespoke and tailored to placement needs. The sessions may be 1-2-1 or group based. The session may include social workers and other professionals to better understand and meet the child's needs.
- 13.5 Thurrock has a strong foster carers association (ONE TEAM). The association provides a range of outings and other social and cultural events for its members. The leadership of the association are consulted and involved in planning and the delivery of services to children and carers.
- 13.6 There are various support groups and peers support sessions offering advice and assistance for carers. Notable examples are; toddler support group, general foster carer's support group, advanced support group and therapeutic foster carer support group.
- 13.7 All newly approved foster carer are entitled to and supported by an experienced foster carer under the budding scheme. (Peer Mentoring)

14. Knowledge, Learning and Development for Carers

- 14.1 All foster carers receive a comprehensive induction. All newly approved foster carers receive support and guidance in achieving the Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards within the first year after approval.
- 14.2 The fostering learning development programme recognises the need for responsiveness and flexibility to carers learning styles and has developed a range of learning opportunities. Systems are being developed to facilitate thematic learning sets, E Learning and other innovative learning resources for 'hard to reach' carers.
- 14.3 The learning and development team maintain a training plan for all carers. Foster carers maintain a training portfolio for their individual learning needs.
- 14.4 Carers annual review consistently appraises training and development needs of foster carers with a clear plan of for how learning gaps would be addressed.

14.5 The service is committed to support foster carer's development. "Fostering Changes" 12 week programme and a Certificate in Therapeutic Care are currently explored as mandatory programme for all advanced and therapeutic carers. It is envisaged that this will consolidate good practice and build on behaviour management techniques.

15. Annual Review of Foster Carers

15.1 The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer is responsible for coordinating all annual reviews. Review is carried out in accordance with Regulation 28 (Fostering Services Regulation 2011). All Foster Carers are required to attend panel on the first and every third year review.

15.2 The reviewing process considers and ensures suitability of foster carers and their household in promoting the needs of children in a safe and caring environment. The process also includes an annual health and safety inspection report and outcomes of unannounced visits undertaken in the past year.

15.3 As a department we continue to work towards developing a robust and effective annual reviewing process as we acknowledge that Thurrock Foster Carers' Annual Reviews is essential requirement in providing quality placements.

16. Complaints and Compliments

16.1 From 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, the service received 7 complaints from birth parents and 3 allegations from looked after children. 4 complaints were resolved at Stage one, 3 at stage two. Of the 3 allegations, one was unsubstantiated and the carer continues to foster. One was substantiated and the carer was deregistered. The third allegation had a S47 child protection completed and there was not enough evidence to proceed further.

16.2 The service aims to respond to all complaints in a timely and objective manner in order to seek an early resolution that is satisfactory to the complainant.

16.3 Complaints received are addressed and resolved in the context of learning and improving practice. The common theme of 2016/17 complaint was 'drift and the cumbersome process of investigations into allegation of abuse and standards of care'. In response, the service has co-produced guidance with foster carers which ensure timeliness and transparency of all investigations into allegations, standards of care complaints against foster carers.

16.4 There were many compliments from service users, birth parents and professionals. The service has kept a file of compliments. The number of compliment received has informed the re-introduction of foster carer's annual recognition awards effective, 2017.

17. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 17.1 The placement budget is overstretched due to insufficient number of in-house carers. As a result, a new recruitment campaign has been launched with a slogan **“MAKE A DIFFERENCE”**. Furthermore a business case has been submitted for consideration and if approved will drive the campaign to increase the number of carers within the next two years.
- 17.2 The specific actions being undertaken include the following:
- 17.3 Targeted recruitment of foster carers to mitigate the increase in demand for Parent and Child foster placements, Teenagers with challenging behaviours and large sibling groups. “Short Breaks” Carers are also being recruited for children with disabilities.
- 17.4 Early Permanency plans for children in external (out of borough) placements and strategic use of In-House provision for children aged, 12 – or younger, with long term fostering plans, and to continue the effective use of SGOs to achieve permanency for children in long term care
- 17.5 Improve the quality of support offered to foster carers and to expand their capacity to accommodate challenging and ‘hard to place’ children.
- 17.6 New ways of working by using data to predict the needs of the service and to review our statement of purpose regularly to align with our approach to meeting the needs and demands of the service.
- 17.7 Co-production of newsletter with foster carers to strengthen their involvement in the day to running of the fostering service.

18. Reasons for Recommendation

The Fostering Service is required under Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 25 to ensure that the executive side of the Local Authority receive written reports on the management, outcomes and progress of the Fostering Service [NMS 25.7]. Therefore, this report is intended to provide a summary analysis of performance, and inform on key issues for the future.

19. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny)

- 19.1 Foster Carers, Independent Fostering Panel and IMPOWER were all consulted.
- 19.2 Feedback from service users (foster children) has also been incorporated in this report.

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

20.1 The Fostering Statement of Purpose has been updated to reflect the current outlook of the fostering service.

21. Implications

21.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**
Management Accountant

A new recruitment strategy has been developed to increase the number of fosters carers by 60 (net Increase) in the next two years. As a result some investment has been proposed in a new business case. If approved, the council will be investing three hundred and ten thousand over the next 2 years. The anticipated savings and cost avoidance will be in the in excess of one million pounds over a four-year period.

21.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

The fostering Service complies with the Fostering Services Regulations, 2011 and 2013 for the recruitment, assessment, approval, and matching, training and continuous support of foster carers. Furthermore, it is important to note that whilst the Local Authority continues to scrutinise all placements it also has to be aware of its duties under the Children Act 1989, which must be the focus on the best interest of each child, especially when exploring placements.

21.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

The Fostering Service considers the needs of each individual child/young person, which includes their religion, language and disability to ensure these placements meet all their needs on a holistic level. In addition, the service undertakes a proactive approach to recruitment to encourage diversity across foster carers.

There is also the need to consider issues such as child sexual exploitation is also prevalent when sourcing placements and looking at the individual needs of each child/young person.

21.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

The Fostering Service takes into consideration the experience and quality of staff, health and safety issues. There is a mandatory clinical supervision for all

foster carers and other mechanisms in place to assess and support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of fostered children and their carers

22. 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):

- None

23. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Recruitment Analysis 2016/17

Report Author:

Andrews Owusu Osei
Service Manager - Family Placement
Children's Services