

4 January 2022		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Fostering Recruitment Strategy: Update November 2021		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not applicable	
Report of: Dan Jones, Service Manager Fostering		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help.		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides the Corporate Parenting Committee with an outline of the fostering recruitment being undertaken and includes Key Performance Indicators reflecting the impact of the new brand with the implementation of the new marketing campaign.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **Members are updated on Thurrock's Fostering Recruitment Strategy and its impact on the numbers of foster carer approvals.**
- 1.2 **Members note the marketing activities being undertaken so opportunities are created to increase the recruitment of foster carers**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report is prepared by way of an update to the Fostering Recruitment Report presented to Corporate Parenting Committee in June 2021. The Committee were informed about the plan to update Thurrock Council's Fostering Brand and the steps being taken to attract and increase the recruitment of Foster Carers.
 - 2.1.1 We accept applicants from any background who are able to meet the National Minimum Standards for fostering and offer a safe loving home to a child. The recruitment process usually takes about four months from application to approval. This is shorter if the applicant is already an approved foster carer from another agency.

2.1.2 The Communications Team, Web Team and IT have been working with the Fostering Recruitment team to ensure the marketing campaign for foster carers is prioritised. Activity has included:

- Advertising in the Council Tax Leaflet and this was sent to every address in Thurrock in March 2021
- Appropriate recruitment materials are in place across the Borough with 29 banners (as at Herringham School, Blackshots Pool, Grays Methodist Church) strategically placed to attract and raise public awareness in relation to the Thurrock Fostering recruitment. This is reviewed monthly to ensure there is a continuous high profile of the campaign across the Borough
- There has been an increase in online advertising and using new outlets which has included the Mail-Online covering South Essex Area
- There is new lamp-post advertising which has been completed for Crown Road to Grays Train Station
- There has been a newly developed campaign video produced with the Fostering Network, launched nationally, Thurrock have agreement with Lakeside so the video is being played on a large screen, this was in place throughout November 2021
- Direct engagement with the community at local events (e.g. Parkrun, community days, attending Lakeside)
- The corporate website has been updated and there are links to simplified forms and easier transfer to Thurrock Fostering from other agencies. The website has the colourful brand with videos and personal testimonies of foster carers
- There is a joint venture with another Local Authority to promote fostering recruitment on Sky TV. The impact of this new marketing is being monitored as it was initiated in November 2021

2.1.3 Increased marketing and promotion in Quarter 2 has led to improved application numbers and enquiries from a low point as the country has moved out of lockdown. Thurrock Council continues to be in urgent need of increasing the foster carer community; the recent improvement in the number of new applications is very welcome, and we continue to create opportunities so a greater volume of applications are made to grow our overall number of foster carers. In addition to the above, further marketing is planned to support this including roundabouts and continually updating of the website

2.2 **Outcomes**

There are increased enquiries as a result of launch of the new campaign. In August 2021 we received the highest number of applications in a 12 month period and, as of November 2021, there are **11** fostering households in assessment. This should generate approximately **16** placements for children (subject to successful full assessment)

Advertising impact (year to date compared to last year):

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total YTD	2020/21
Facebook/Google/Social Media	0	1	7	0	1	2	2	2	15	57
Banners	0	0	2	0	1	3	1	3	10	6
Roundabouts	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	N/a
Events/Stalls	n/a	n/a	0	1	3	2	0	2	9	2
Thurrock Council Website	4	4	4	6	4	3	5	4	34	40
Council Tax Booklet/leaflet	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1
Lamp-posts	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	2	3	N/a

Progress of applications (year to date compared to last year):

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total YTD	2020/21
Number of households attending Information Sessions	4	3	3	3	1	2	6	3	25	Not collected
Number of Enquiries	1	8	15	11	16	13	11	17	92	188
Number of IVs completed	3	5	3	6	6	9	4	4	40	74
Number of Applications Received	0	2	1	0	8	1	2	1	15	31
Number of applications dropped out	3	3	4	2	0	2	0	0	14	10
Numbers of approved foster carers	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	6	11
Transfer from IFA to Thurrock	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2

30/11/2021

In House

Total number of Fostering Households	85
Number of children placed with in house carers	109
IFA	
Number of children placed with IFA carers	119

2.3 Offer

Thurrock Council has a highly competitive support offer for our foster carers. Foster carers approved by Thurrock Council receive:

- Priority for local placements for Thurrock children.
- Regular social work and clinical psychological 1:1 time and support
- An established fostering community with formal and informal support groups

Thurrock provides the following financial support per child per week

Child's Age	Allowance only	Allowance + Care Skills fee	Allowance + Care Skills Plus fee	High need rate (Enhanced allowance and fee)
0 to 4	£147	£347	£397	£497
5 to 10	£168	£368	£418	£518
11 to 15	£210	£410	£460	£560
16+	£252	£452	£502	£602

In addition, Foster Carers who live in Thurrock and Foster a Thurrock child for a minimum number of days per annum have their Council Tax waived.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Since the launch of the new brand the number of applications has been steadily increasing and there is recovery from 2019/2020 when Covid impacted significantly on the recruitment and marketing of foster carers. In November 2021 Ofsted released a report on the national picture for Fostering¹. That report highlights the continued national shortage of foster placements and confirms the challenges Thurrock has faced are not unique to our Local Authority.

¹ • Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings>

The Ofsted report highlights key issues:-

- The number of approved Foster Carers across England is not keeping up with demand despite the highest level of approvals; *Thurrock has slightly fewer foster carers but the number of children in placement has remained stable*
- Nationally enquiries to foster are at an all-time high but conversion to application is falling; *Thurrock is not reflecting the national picture and has a good conversion rate to application*
- 20% of approved placements nationally are unavailable; *Thurrock's rate of placements being unavailable is lower than the national rate at 12%.*

3.2 The Ofsted report reviewed national data following the pandemic. Covid-19 has impacted people's readiness to foster because of either its impact on individuals' families or in their concern that fostering may increase risks around contracting Covid-19.

3.3 Thurrock Council will need to continue to attract members of the public into fostering. This will require further development of our marketing approach including using a range of media to generate interest and enquiries.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Members to note and consider the options available

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

5.1 We consult monthly with our foster carers via a group focussed on recruitment. Their views and ideas are included in our planning.

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

6.1 The Communications Team have supported the recruitment of Foster Carers and we would want this to continue with foster care recruitment being a corporate priority with marketing being innovative and wide ranging.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

The increased recruitment of foster carers will assist in the reduction of Independent Fostering Agencies and support the Council with their own cohort of foster carers.

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

A key part of the Looked after Children Strategy and Medium Term financial plan is to increase the number of foster carers.

7.2 Legal

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

The Council has a duty under Section 22G of the Children Act , so far as reasonably practicable, to secure accommodation for children that it is looking after in the Council's area, which meets the needs of those children: where this is consistent with those children's welfare.

The ways that the Council may provide that accommodation is set out in Section 22C of the Children Act 1989 and this includes the provision of foster placements. The placement, so far as reasonably practicable, must:

- a) Allow the child to live near the child's home
- b) Not to disrupt the child's education or training
- c) To enable siblings to live together
- d) Meet a disabled child's particular needs
- e) Is within the Council's area

Any recruitment strategy for foster carers should assist the Council in fulfilling these duties.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

Applications to foster are welcomed from anyone of any background who wishes to apply. They are assessed against the National Minimum Fostering Standards and individual needs, circumstances etc. are addressed in detail.

The Fostering Service is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are also is committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families. Increasing the numbers of foster carers provides greater choice of placements for looked after children and improved matching of children with carers. This will support our Thurrock children to fulfil their potential as they have homes providing stability.

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

Good practice is to place children in care in their local community where possible to do so. Unless the number of local foster placements are increased this could lead to children being placed further away.

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):

- Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose
- Payments to Foster Carers Policy
- Fostering in England 2020 to 2021: main findings - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/fostering-in-england-2020-to-2021-main-findings>

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Dan Jones

Service Manager

Fostering, Adoption and Children with Disabilities Service