

**Cabinet Response to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Review into the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers in Hackney****Key Decision No. Not a Key Decision**

<b>CABINET MEETING DATE (2018/19)</b> 16 July 2018	<b>CLASSIFICATION:</b>  Open
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED</b> All Wards	
<b>CABINET MEMBER</b> Cllr Bramble Deputy Mayor	
<b>KEY DECISION</b> No	
<b>GROUP DIRECTOR</b> Anne Canning Group Director Children Adults and Community Health	

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Understanding that it is vitally important that our children and young people feel safe, secure, valued, and listened to. We recently reconfirmed our ongoing commitment to giving all our young people the best start in life.
- 1.2. Part of that recommitment is a recognition of the incredibly important role that foster carers can play in the lives of many children. In Hackney we work hard to ensure that our fostered children are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To support this our Fostering Service is committed to recruiting, training, and approving foster carers, and delivering ongoing support to them.
- 1.3. The Scrutiny Report rightly highlights the great work that has been done by many of our residents who have become foster carers. It is an immense commitment, but one that with great reward for the carers and our children and young people. The report also rightly commends the work of our Fostering Service, whose efforts provide so many with so much support.
- 1.4. The report is also correct to highlight the difficulty that local authorities have in recruiting and retaining enough carers to fulfil a growing need. However, as this response indicates, our service is currently reviewing the service we provide, and the timely work of the Scrutiny Commission, and the recommendations that they have made, will help inform the new services and strategies that are developed to ensure we are able to fulfil our commitment.
- 1.5. I commend this report to Cabinet.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1. The Cabinet is asked to approve the content of this response.

## Executive Response to the Scrutiny Recommendations

### Recommendation One

It is recommended that when the local looked after children sufficiency strategy is updated, measures to ensure the retention of foster carers are included which:

- (i) Provide for individualised training programmes for in-house foster carers;
- (ii) Are informed by regular surveys and consultations with foster carers where such information will help to identify where the local support offer is sufficient and what could be improved;
- (iii) Are informed by systematic exit interviews conducted with all those foster carers who deregister from the in-house service, to help identify those trends or patterns which may impact on a decision to leave;
- (iv) Are underpinned by a package of remuneration which is regularly benchmarked against other neighbouring local authorities;
- (v) Ensure that foster carers are provided with training and development opportunities which enable them to progress through the foster carer banding system so that each year (at least): - 8 level 1 carers progress to level 2; and - 4 level 2 carers progress to level 3
- (vi) Set out how to increase the number of in-house foster carers that are trained to become Foster Carer Ambassadors from 6 to 12.
- (vii) Ensure that foster carers who are the subject of allegations or concerns about their practice or standards of care should have access to independent support to assist them to clarify the stages of the procedure and help them to represent their point of

The current Sufficiency Strategy was published in 2016 and will be refreshed in 2019. The Sufficiency Strategy action plan is regularly reviewed and monitored. The Commission's recommendations are helpful and additional actions will be added to the Sufficiency Strategy action plan based on the recommendations, and incorporated into the refreshed Sufficiency Strategy in 2019.

As a result of changes to policy brought in by this Executive, an extensive training programme is currently provided to Hackney in-house foster carers. The next published Foster Carer training programme will be available in September 2018. Recommendations for training will start to be incorporated into the foster carer training programme from June 2018 where appropriate.

<p>view;</p> <p>(viii) Ensure that there is sufficient respite (in respect of duration and quality) for foster carers.</p>	
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<p><b>Recommendation Two</b></p> <p>It is recommended that the Fostering Service should develop a new, ambitious and long-term local foster carer recruitment strategy. This strategy should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Be informed by a local needs analysis of its population of looked after children to determine the types of care placements required and the skills and experience required of foster carers (e.g. those looking after teenagers, complex needs and SEND);</li> <li>(ii) Set ambitious targets for the recruitment of in-house foster carers in the short, medium and long term: 23 new recruits per year should be the new target.</li> <li>(iii) Adopt an 'Always Be Recruiting' approach, which seeks to maximise Hackney Fostering Service presence, engagement and recruitment at all council and other local events;</li> <li>(iv) Seek to encompass and target under-represented groups, who may not traditionally associate themselves with fostering or do not feel that they have the right skills or experience (e.g. the childless, under 35s, single people, men and the LGBTQi community);</li> <li>(v) Develop recruitment campaigns which focus on the specific needs of looked after children and the required skills of foster carers (e.g. teenagers, complex needs, parent and child);</li> <li>(vi) Maximise the use of word of</li> </ul>	<p>The current foster carer recruitment strategy will be reviewed in May 2018 and the Commission's recommendations will be incorporated into the updated strategy</p> <p>An update will be provided to the Commission in the Autumn.</p>
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<p>mouth interventions, such as through the Foster Carer Ambassadors scheme;</p> <p>(vii) Ensure that there is a dedicated and high profile on-line foster carer recruitment presence (given the importance of this and the limited local resource, it should be explored whether this function could be provided jointly across participating boroughs in the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium);</p> <p>(viii) Ensure that recruitment campaigns are responsive and enquiries for in-house foster carers are dealt with promptly (at the latest, the next day).</p> <p>(ix) Seek to refocus recruitment across a broader range of housing tenures, seeking potential recruits in both the privately owned and privately rented sector (where there may be greater housing capacity).</p>	
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<p><b>Recommendation Three</b></p> <p>The Commission understands that the Council has been running a pilot scheme offering up to 4 larger properties to experienced foster carers to enable them to take on additional placements of looked after children. It would be beneficial if this scheme was formalised and agreed, reflecting approaches taken in the neighbouring boroughs of Camden and Islington.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the Council:</p> <p>(a) Allocate 4 larger (2-4 bedroom) properties to the Fostering Service each year to enable experienced, long term foster</p>	<p>Hackney Fostering Service is in the process of formalising this scheme with colleagues from the Council's Benefits and Housing Needs Service and will explore the feasibility of the recommendation by June 2018. An update will be provided to the</p>
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<p>carers to provide additional placements, particularly for teenagers (as per the Camden model);</p> <p>(b) Give priority to adult children in foster carer households in local social housing allocation policies, to enable foster carers to take on additional placements for looked after children (as per the Islington model).</p>	<p>Commission in 6 months.</p> <p>Hackney Fostering Service will explore this further with the Council's Benefits and Housing Needs Service. An update will be provided to the Commission in 6 months.</p>
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<p><b>Recommendation Four</b></p> <p>To bring the Hackney offer into line with other north east London boroughs (e.g. Waltham Forest, Redbridge), the Council should consider the introduction of a Council Tax reduction scheme for foster carers. Such a scheme should:</p> <p>(a) Reflect a level of discount commensurate to the experience and longevity of foster carers (e.g. in alignment with the current banding system e.g. 33% for level 1, 66% for level 2 and 100% for level 3);</p> <p>(b) Provide greater discounts for the care of looked after children who are difficult to match to suitable placements (e.g. children aged 13-17, or parent and child placements);</p> <p>(c) Acknowledge that not all foster carers live within Hackney and will not be eligible to benefit from such a scheme, and therefore provide them with an annual retainer payment (also based on experience).</p>	<p>Hackney Fostering Service will review these recommendations with the Council's Benefits and Housing Needs Service and will provide an update to the Commission in 6 months.</p>
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<p><b>Recommendation Five</b></p>	
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<p>The Commission understands that Hackney foster carers already have access to cultural, leisure and other opportunities to support their role. The Commission recommends that the Fostering Service reviews these and explores other opportunities that might be available for foster carers through other services of the Council and local community and voluntary sector (and consult with current foster carers about what would be helpful or appealing to them).</p>	<p>Hackney Fostering Service will work closely with Hackney's Foster Carer Council to progress this recommendation and develop a guide for foster carers that gives all necessary information around support they can access. The Service aims to finalise the guide by October 2018.</p>
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<p><b>Recommendation Six</b></p> <p>Whilst the vacancy rate in Hackney is on a par with, if not better than, the national average, evidence given to the Commission from foster carers would suggest that foster carers are not being utilised as much as they would like, and was a factor in some carers' decisions to de-register. Thus, as well as recruiting more in-house foster carers, it was evident that better use could be made of the existing pool of foster carers. It is recommended that the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Consider the implementation of the 'Step Up Step Down' programme - which seeks to utilise in-house foster carers to provide additional preventative support to those children on the edge of the care system;</li> <li>(ii) As per the Islington model, consider whether in-house foster carer vacancies can be used to support placements in other boroughs, such as within the NL Consortium or further afield;</li> <li>(iii) Increase the number of Foster Carer Ambassadors in Hackney to extend the capacity for targeted outreach recruitment</li> </ul>	<p>A working group will be set up to consider how we implement the recommendations and will include representatives from Hackney's Foster Carer Council. The recommendations will also be incorporated into the Sufficiency Strategy Board Action Plan</p>
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<p>and to support newly appointed foster carers (increase from current 6 to 12);</p> <p>(iv) Consider further ways in which peer support mechanisms can be used to support fostering practice and increase the skills and knowledge base of local in-house foster carers and their ability to provide a wider range of foster placements;</p> <p>(v) Develop the skill base of the existing pool of foster carers to better enable them to support the needs of looked after children in Hackney, particularly those looking after young adolescents aged 13 and above and parent and child placements.</p>	
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<p><b>Recommendation Seven</b></p> <p>It is recommended that the Council develop a joint working protocol with partner IFAs which:</p> <p>(i) Addresses issues around the quality and cost of foster care placements;</p> <p>(ii) Seeks to develop usage of foster carers in the IFA sector in a planned way which enables both IFAs and the LA to plan more effectively;</p> <p>(iii) Allows for more effective commissioning and contract management (quality and outcomes of placements);</p> <p>(iv) Enables IFAs and the LA to work cooperatively in line with the Leeds model which seeks to increase the number of 'local solutions for looked after children' by seeking to maximise the use of foster care placements in Hackney (irrespective of which sector foster carers may work for) to help develop and maintain strong support networks for children and their carers.</p>	<p>The Children and Families Service will explore the potential for further development of sub-regional and regional protocols with IFAs through the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium, the North East London Efficiency Programme and a wider London framework.</p> <p>This will also be explored as part of the refreshed Sufficiency Strategy that will be published in 2019.</p> <p>In addition, the Service will hold an annual engagement event with IFA providers to improve relationships, address issues around the quality and cost of foster care placements, and seek to develop usage of foster carers in the IFA sector in a planned way which enables both IFAs and the Council to plan more effectively.</p>
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**Recommendation Eight**

It is recommended that the Council and Fostering Service continue to engage and further develop its relationship with the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC) and identify additional opportunities for collaborative partnerships, particularly in relation to:

- (i) Effective commissioning of services to support the training and development of foster carers, particularly specialist support;
- (ii) Increased capacity (finance and expertise) for the recruitment of foster carers particularly those with specialist skills or experience (e.g. looking after teenagers, SEND, parent and child etc.);
- (iii) Identify ways in which it can work collaboratively with the IFA sector.

These recommendations will be incorporated into the Sufficiency Strategy Board Action Plan.

**Recommendation Nine**

The Education Select Committee at the Houses of Parliament conducted a review of Fostering Services in 2017 and has published its report in January 2018 (House of Commons, 2018). This report has in turn contributed to the Government's fostering stocktake, which has been undertaken by Sir Martin Narey on behalf of the Department of Education (Narey & Overs, 2018).

The report of the Education Select Committee makes a number of recommendations, including the establishment of a national foster carer recruitment campaign.

Hackney Fostering Service has reviewed the Narey report and is already considering how the wider Service will respond to the recommendations.

An update will be provided to the Commission in 6 months in relation to the Service's response to the Narey report (the Fostering Stocktake), the Education Select Committee report on fostering, and the Government's response to both reports.

It is recommend that when the Fostering Service report back to the Commission in 6 months, it also includes a response to those recommendations contained within both the Education Select Committee and Department of Education national stocktake reports, particularly those relating to recruitment and retention of foster carers.

### **Recommendation Ten**

The Commission took evidence from both local officers and national bodies on the Mockingbird Scheme, a hub and spoke approach to establish a network of support to local foster carers. Evidence presented to the review suggested that this model can offer more support to foster carers, maintain and engage local foster carers and improve the nature and level of care provided to looked after children. The Fostering Network is working with a number of areas to pilot the Mockingbird approach.

It is recommended that the Fostering Service should actively engage with the Fostering Network to identify if Hackney can be included within the existing pilot scheme or within any planned future roll-out of this approach to foster care.

Hackney Fostering Service shares the Scrutiny Commission's view that the Mockingbird Model is a helpful approach to strengthen foster carer resilience. The Service is in the process of signing a contract with the Fostering Network to implement the model in Hackney.

An update will be provided to the Commission on this project in 6 months.