

Children and Families Service update on Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Review of Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers - March 2019

Recommendation	Update: April 2018	Update: March 2019
<p>Recommendation One</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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 	<p>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.</p> <p>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>	<p>The Sufficiency Strategy is currently being reviewed with a view to an updated version being available by June 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The foster carer training programme was updated to reflect the needs of looked after children in Hackney, and was shared with foster carers in October 2018. The foster carer training programme will be reviewed on an annual basis. Individualised training needs are incorporated into the programme based on feedback and learning from annual reviews and foster carer forums. Furthermore foster carers are able to access training from the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC¹). ii. The fostering service are in consultation with the Hackney Foster Care Council (HFCC) around gathering meaningful feedback. Additionally every foster carer completes a yearly feedback form as part of their annual review. All feedback is captured and shared for service improvement. iii. All foster carers who deregister complete an exit interview where learning is captured. As at March 2019, there have been no foster carers deregistered in 2018/19. iv. The service works closely with the North London

¹ NLAFC is comprised of six London Boroughs, and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies, who have joined together to improve services to children, birth families and to families involved in the fields of adoption and fostering.

<p>to level 2; and - 4 level 2 carers progress to level 3</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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 view;</p> <p>(viii) Ensure that there is sufficient respite (in respect of duration and quality) for foster carers.</p>		<p>Adoption Fostering Consortium and have compared their package of remuneration with Local Authority members of the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium. A financial working group undertook a thorough comparison across neighbouring boroughs to ensure Hackney's package of remuneration is in line with neighbouring boroughs. The service's financial policy is in the process of being updated to reflect this.</p> <p>v. As at March 2019, five level 1 foster carers had progressed to level 2 and two level 2 foster carers progressed to level 3 in 2018/19. Following feedback from the HFCC, the Fostering Service has recently reviewed the developmental requirements which enable foster carers to progress through the banding system so that experienced foster carers are supported to progress into level 3.</p> <p>vi. The Fostering Service has exceeded the target of recruiting 12 Foster Carer Ambassadors and has successfully recruited 13 as at March 2019. Foster Care Ambassadors were recruited through liaison with social workers and foster carer forums.</p> <p>vii. Support is offered to all foster carers subject to allegations through the HFCC and the Fostering Network (funded by Hackney).</p> <p>viii. All foster carers are entitled to a minimum of two weeks respite a year. Additional respite can be provided and all requests are assessed on a case by case basis. The Mockingbird model² (see Recommendation 10) will provide additional support and respite for foster carers.</p>
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Recommendation Two		
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² The Mockingbird model is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

<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"> (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); (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. (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; (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); (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); (vi) Maximise the use of word of mouth interventions, such as through the Foster Carer Ambassadors scheme; 	<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 2018.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The foster carer recruitment strategy was updated in July 2018. The recruitment activity is informed by the local needs analysis of Hackney's Looked After Children and various publications are used to target a diverse audience for instance, public sector workers and education professionals . Publications include Primary Times, SEN magazine, Teachers Today and Education for Everyone. ii. 14 foster carer families are predicted to be recruited in 2018/19, which is higher than our neighbouring and consortium boroughs. The service continues to explore new ways of working to support the efforts of the team to reach the set target of 23 with quality assessments. iii. The Fostering Service has adopted an ‘Always Be Recruiting’ approach, which seeks to maximise the service’s presence, engagement and recruitment at all council and other local events. This approach is ongoing and has been incorporated into business as usual. iv. Fostering advertisements have incorporated messages that reach out to the LGBTQI+ community and have organised an LGBTQI+ family picnic. Similarly a social media campaign ran which corrected some myths about fostering such as clarifying that individuals can apply as a single candidate. There has been an increase over 2017/18 in single male applicants. Furthermore an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) project will target prospective foster carers from a diverse background such as Vietnamese, Ethiopian and Albanian. v. Recruitment campaigns have been developed, that focus on the specific needs of Hackney’s looked after children. Campaigns have focused on teenagers, LGBTQI+, UASC and parent and child placements. Joint recruitment campaigns have also been developed with
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<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>		<p>North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium targeting potential foster carers across a number of boroughs.</p> <p>vi. Ambassadors are asked to attend all outreach and public engagement activities. They also on occasion call and share their experience of fostering with those considering fostering. A fostering referral scheme is also in place and a number of potential foster carers have made contact through this route.</p> <p>vii. A dedicated and high profile online foster carer recruitment presence is in place. The North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium has a website that takes enquires and redirects individuals to their home borough. Additionally the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium has a social media presence that allows information sharing. The Fostering Service continue to work with other boroughs around fostering recruitment online activity.</p> <p>viii. All enquiries are followed up within two working days. Anyone completing the online eligibility checker is able to download an information pack and request a call back at their preferred time.</p> <p>ix. The current focus has been for those with a spare bedroom to consider fostering; this applies to homeowners/lease holders and those renting. Consultation with Housing Services have taken place. Where possible, links will be made with the Housing Service to explore the possibility of potential candidates already living in council housing relocating to bigger housing. This has been challenging due to candidates not meeting the set housing criteria.</p>
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<p>Recommendation Three</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 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>(a) 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 Commission in 6 months.</p> <p>(b) 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>	<p>a) The scheme has been formalised by the Hackney Fostering Service and Housing Needs Service. There have been challenges recruiting foster carers to the scheme due to the specific set housing criteria.</p> <p>(b) Hackney Fostering Service has been explored this further and Housing Needs Service have advised that they unfortunately are not able to commit to this at the moment.</p>
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<p>Recommendation Four</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>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>	<p>The Council's Benefits and Housing Needs Service confirmed that their current scheme will remain in place until March 2019. An update from Housing Needs Service will be provided following review in the new financial year 2019/20.</p>
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<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>		
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<p>Recommendation Five</p> <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>	<p>The Fostering Newsletter published on a quarterly basis by the Fostering Service advertises current events and organisations in the borough which carers can access. This includes other services foster carers can have access to through the local community and voluntary sector. The Hackney Fostering Service continues to work closely with The Hackney Foster Care Council about what would be helpful and appealing to them.</p>
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<p>Recommendation Six</p>		
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<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"> (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; (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; (iii) Increase the number of Foster Carer Ambassadors in Hackney to extend the capacity for targeted outreach recruitment and to support newly appointed foster carers (increase from current 6 to 12); (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; (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 	<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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A 'Step Up Step Down' programme is in place, and in-house foster carers are supporting with outreach when they have vacancies. Furthermore, in-house foster carers support Children in Need (CIN) cases with respite to prevent children from coming into care. This will be incorporated into the updated Sufficiency Strategy. ii. A list of in-house foster carer vacancies is shared on a weekly basis with the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium to ensure that the consortium boroughs are informed of the availability of in-house foster carer placements in neighbouring boroughs. iii. The Fostering Service has exceeded the target of recruiting 12 Foster Carer Ambassadors and has successfully recruited 13 as at March 2019. Experienced foster carers are encouraged to speak to people considering fostering and new foster carers. iv. The Mockingbird model will also provide peer support through the creation of a community network similar to that of an extended family. To further support fostering practice, experienced foster carers are paired up with new foster carers by the fostering officer and matching social worker when required. v. The training programme has been updated in October 2018 to reflect the needs of the looked after children in Hackney. The North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium is also offering parent and child placement training. An induction level 3 training workshop was held to explore with level 3 foster carers specialist training they felt would be beneficial. Feedback will be incorporated into the next training programme. Level 3 foster carers are encouraged to request training they feel is required which Hackney's Fostering Service will
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young adolescents aged 13 and above and parent and child placements.		consider supporting.
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<p>Recommendation Seven</p> <p>It is recommended that the Council develop a joint working protocol with partner IFAs which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Addresses issues around the quality and cost of foster care placements; (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; (iii) Allows for more effective commissioning and contract management (quality and outcomes of placements); (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>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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The North East London residential programme³ are exploring a wider London framework to address issues around the quality and cost of foster care placements. The North East London residential partnership has scope to extend to other boroughs as well as the potential to include semi-independent accommodation and children's homes. ii. An annual engagement event by the North East London residential programme will be held in April 2019. This will be an open space event to consult with IFAs around plans for more effective usage of foster carers in the IFA sector. iii. The North East London residential programme aims to provide more effective commissioning and contract management. Young people have been involved in the commissioning process and will be involved in visiting placements scheduled to take place in April 2019. iv. Hackney Fostering Service is part of the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium who are focused on increasing the number of local solutions for looked after children by seeking to maximise the use of foster carer placements.
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Recommendation Eight		
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³ The project will deliver and test the use of block contracts, incentivising the delivery of outcomes and three-way coproduction between the sub-regional partnership, young people, and providers. It will also invest in workforce development opportunities.

<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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. 	<p>These recommendations will be incorporated into the Sufficiency Strategy Board Action Plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Foster carers have access to all training provided by the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium. Specialist training and access to support groups is included as part of the offer. ii. There are regular joint recruitment and advertising campaigns with Hackney Fostering Service and the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium members. Bespoke videos have been created to target potential foster carers with specialist skills or experience, for instance those who may have skills working on teenagers or parent and child placements. iii. An annual engagement event by the North East London residential programme will be held in April 2019. This will be an open space event to consult with IFAs around plans for more effective usage of foster carers in the IFA sector and working collaboratively.
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<p>Recommendation Nine</p> <p>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).</p> <p>The report of the Education Select Committee makes a number of recommendations, including the establishment of a national foster carer recruitment campaign.</p> <p>It is recommend that when the Fostering Service</p>	<p>Hackney Fostering Service has reviewed the Narey report and is already considering how the wider Service will respond to the recommendations.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>An update will be provided in March 2019 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.</p>
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<p>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.</p>		
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<p>Recommendation Ten</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>An update will be provided to the Commission on this project in 6 months.</p>	<p>Implementation of the Mockingbird Model Project is underway with a project board meeting monthly to review progress. The Mockingbird Model Project have successfully recruited one hub home carer, who was already known to the service, and a liaison worker. Recruitment of the satellite carers is currently in progress. The Mockingbird project is on track to launch in Spring/Summer 2019.</p>
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