

# Fostering Recruitment and Retention Update for CYP Scrutiny Commission - September 2022

## Our Local Context

As of March 2022, we have 410 looked after children in the care of the Local Authority:

- 55% are male and 45% female;
- 76% are from Black or Global Majority communities and 24% are white;
- 24% are living in Hackney and 76% outside of Hackney;
- 72% living in fostering homes; 17% living with connected carers; 8.5% are living in semi-independent accommodation; 8% in children's homes; 3% living with their parents under a care order; 2% living with prospective adopters; and 2% in a mother and baby care arrangement.
- 33% are aged 16 or 17 and 31% aged between 12 and 15, with a fairly even distribution over the lower age range.

As of March 2022, we were also supporting 359 care leavers aged 18 to 25. This includes 254 care experienced young people, aged 18 to 21, who we have a statutory duty to support with finding suitable accommodation.

- 62% are male and 38% are female;
- 77% are from Black and Global Majority communities and 23% are white;
- 37% are living in Hackney and 63% outside;
- 49% are living in supported accommodation; 17% staying put with former foster carers; 10% in independent accommodation; 6% with family; 6% in custody and 4% in supported lodgings.

Of our children living in foster homes, 44% are living with in-house foster carers or connected carers and 56% with carers registered with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). As with most local authorities, we do not have enough in-house foster carers to care for the number of Hackney children who need a foster home. There is a big private market in Independent Fostering Agencies. The size and ethos of each agency, as well as the quality of support on offer to their carers and costs of placing a child with them, can vary considerably between IFAs. IFA carers are supervised directly by the agency that they work for, who are also responsible for their training and support needs and oversight of their fostering registration. Most IFAs operate for profit, which drives their costs up and makes the use of an IFA carer a more expensive option than one of our in-house carers. When children are living with in-house carers, they benefit from a closer working relationship between the child's unit and our fostering service, as well as from our enhanced knowledge about the experience, skills and support needs of the carers, which helps us to put in the right support to the care arrangement to support its sustainability over time.

Our Placements Management Unit (PMU) supports the commissioning of all homes for our looked after children and care leavers, whilst our fostering service recruits and provides the support to in-house foster carers. The total spend on care arrangements for looked after children and care leavers for 2021/22 was £29.7 million. This includes £7.1 million spent with Independent Fostering Agencies, £2.7 with in-house foster care arrangements and £985,000 on connected care arrangements.

Our Fostering Service consists of:

- Two Fostering Support Units, each managed by a Consultant Social Worker, with five social workers and a Unit Coordinator;
- A Permanency Unit, which is managed by a Consultant Social Worker, with 4.6 social workers, who lead on support for Special Guardians and Connected Carers.
- A Matching Consultant, who is responsible for the matching of children with all our in-house foster carers and Supported Lodgings hosts;
- A Fostering Recruitment and Retention Manager, who is responsible for the marketing activities and overseeing the initial recruitment processes; and
- A Practice Development Manager and Service Manager.

The number of foster carer households supported by the Fostering Service since 2018 has increased year on year:

Year	Number of fostering households
2018	128
2019	136
2020	143
2021	153
2022	170

The number of foster carer households who have resigned or had their approvals terminated due to a change in their circumstances (for example, they no longer have a spare room in their home to be used for fostering, or they are moving away); a standards of care issue (where we no longer assess them to be suitable to foster); or retirement since 2018 year on year has varied and is outlined below. The most common reason for the termination of a carer's approval is the end of a connected care arrangement (usually when a child turns 18) as connected carers are approved as foster carers specifically for named children only. In 2022, 8 of the 13 de-registrations were connected carers.

Year	Number of fostering households
2018	17
2019	0

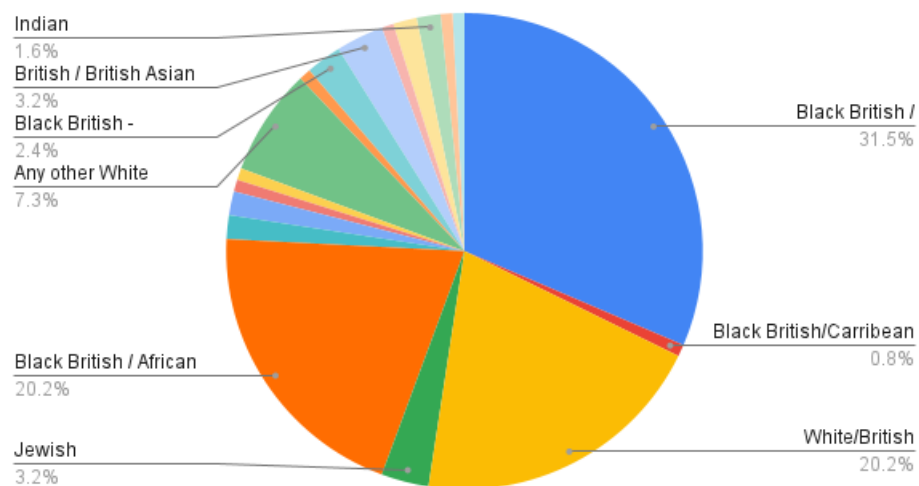
<b>2020</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>13</b>

As of 21 March 2022, Hackney Fostering Service had 170 supported Fostering households. This included:

- 48 Connected Carers;
- 113 mainstream fostering household; and
- 9 Supported Lodgings Hosts.

These households are predominantly female led (91%). The age range of our carers spans from 31 to 75, with the average age of Hackney carers as 53 years old. The majority of Hackney carers are of Black Caribbean (35%) followed by Black African (20%). According to the results of the 2011 census, this is not representative of the borough's population, which is made up of 40% Black and other Global Majority groups, 36% White British and 16% White other.

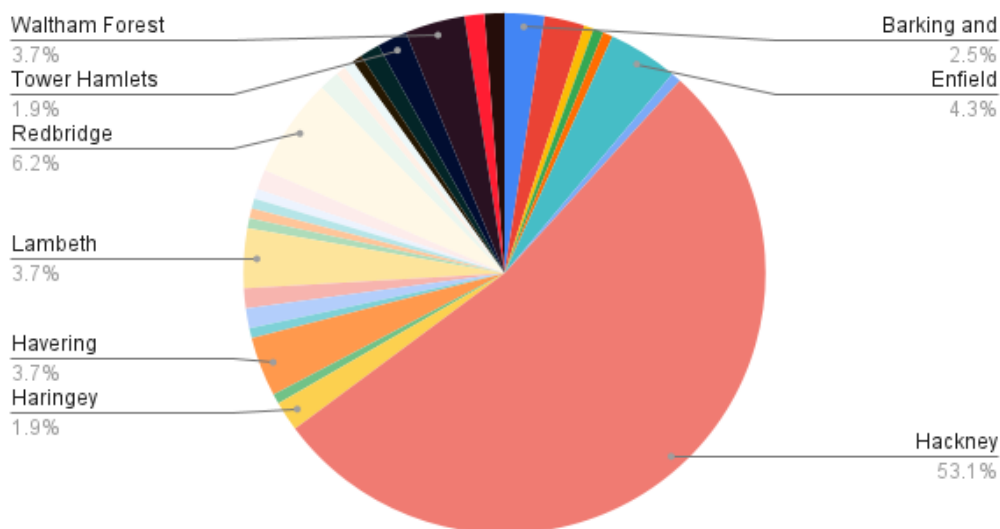
*Ethnicity of Hackney Foster Carers*



Of our 170 fostering households, the majority are single carers. This is reflective of the London population as a whole, as only 40% of adults in London are married or in a civil partnership.

Fifty-three percent of Hackney carers live in the borough. This is positive in terms of supporting Hackney's looked after children to remain close to home, wherever possible and safe, which minimises disruption, for example, in their education provision and key personal and professional relationships. After Hackney, our next most significant population of approved carers live in Redbridge (6.2%) and then Enfield (4.3%).

### Location of Hackney Foster Carers' Homes



### The Current Support Offer for Hackney Foster Carers

The support and wider offer for foster carers who work for Hackney are described in the following locations:

- <https://hackney.gov.uk/why-foster-for-hackney>
- <https://hackney.gov.uk/support-for-hackney-foster-carers>

#### Training

We provide training for prospective carers before they are assessed - this is a three-day 'skills to foster' training course where carers can get an understanding of the role, the support they can expect and the needs of the children they will be caring for. Hackney carers are also able to access training as part of the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium as well as the comprehensive in-house training from Hackney Children and Families.

#### Support

Foster carers have regular supervision with their supervising social worker and an out-of-hours telephone line in case they need support in an emergency. There are a number of support groups for carers including clinical support and a group for male carers. Carers are also supported by the Virtual School to ensure that children in their care are supported in their education.

We also provide our carers with a comprehensive [foster carer handbook](#) which covers the key elements of the foster carer role.

#### Our Ambition

Our ambition is to provide safe, nurturing and sustainable homes for all our looked after children and care leavers. Whilst we recognise at times some children may need different care arrangements for particular periods in their lives, we believe that the best long-term homes for

children and young people are in family settings, with foster carers, connected carers, supported lodgings hosts or staying put arrangements.

We want to help our children and young people to maintain connections with the most important support systems in their life, both friends and family and key professional relationships. We believe the most effective way to do this is to support children and young people to live in or around Hackney, as long as this is safe for them to do so.

We recognise that our care-experienced population come from a diverse range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and have many different support needs, for example, in relation to their gender and sexuality, learning needs and physical and emotional health. We understand that our profile of in-house carers needs to reflect this diversity, for example, in relation to our carer's knowledge, skills, backgrounds, family composition and life experiences, in order to enable us to find the best possible home for each child and young person.

In order to support us to achieve these ambitions, we have set the following key priorities for the year ahead:

- 1. Continue to recruit a diverse range of high quality in-house foster carers;**
- 2. Increase the use of in-house carers over alternative care arrangements;**
- 3. Expand the use of Supported Lodgings hosts;**
- 4. Improve retention rates through high quality support and training.**

#### **Priority 1: Continue to recruit a diverse range of foster carers**

The changing landscape of fostering is being experienced across the country: there is a chronic shortage of foster carers; an exponential rise in costs of care arrangements; and a crisis in children's mental health exacerbated by the pandemic.

A recent [report](#) completed by Ofsted on Fostering in England, 2020 to 2021, found that although the number of initial enquiries into fostering has seen an increase, the number of applications are still relatively low, with only one in seven local authority enquiries translating into a fostering application.

Within Hackney there has been an increase in the complexity of the presenting needs of children in our care and a corresponding increase over time in the number of children being placed into residential children's homes, due to the lack of foster carers with the skills, knowledge and experience required to meet their needs.

The successful recruitment and retention of our in-house foster carers is central to our efforts to reduce the costs of our care arrangements and achieve the best possible outcomes for our looked after children and young people. The potential cost savings for caring for a child in-house are significant.

<b>In-house foster care arrangement p/w</b>	<b>IFA foster care arrangement p/w</b>
£433 - £573*	£850 - £1500

\* NB this cost includes the average fees paid to foster carers (most receive £340-£480 p/w) plus the staffing costs related to supporting these carers.

The Fostering Service has maintained a strong recruitment record over recent years, despite a very challenging national context.

Form F	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Enquiries	352	228	327	272	222
Approvals	17	12	8	15	14

We remain ambitious for the year ahead, with a target of recruiting **15 more new** fostering households.

### ***Delivering more fostering assessments in-house***

Due to capacity constraints within the service, there has been an increasing need to commission high numbers of fostering assessments with independent assessors. This has raised concerns regarding:

- Costs (13 external assessments in 2021/22 cost in total £35,200);
- Issues with the quality of assessments delivered, which can contribute to delays in the approval of new foster carers;
- Unrealistic expectations provided by external assessors of the fostering role or the support that would be provided post assessment. In 2018 four fostering households assessed in this way resigned within a year because they felt ill-prepared for the reality of fostering.

In December 2021, social workers were offered the opportunity to express interest in carrying out Form F assessments as a paid overtime opportunity, as an alternative to external assessments. This resulted in six Form F assessments being allocated internally. To date, the results of this have been positive, with timely, high quality assessments being delivered.

Whilst there is scope to continue this approach to supplement our capacity where required, in the longer-term, the preferred option would be to reinstate a Fostering Recruitment Unit with the capacity to deliver all Form F and Supported Lodgings assessments within the Fostering Service, by workers who have the specialist knowledge and skills required.

### ***Recruitment Activities***

In recent years Hackney has been successful at engaging a diverse audience interested in becoming foster carers. This has been achieved using a mixed media approach and being open to exploring new ways of engagement, as well as a flexible way of working.

The 2020 and 2021 lockdowns highlighted the need for creative thinking within the service and a need to handhold applicants through the process, ensuring they are informed at every step and

thus able to make the right decisions about their own suitability for the role. As the world opens back up, the service must continue to be flexible in its approach, particularly with a view to nurture potential foster carers that can meet the needs of Hackney's children.

With a growing number of children coming into care displaying more challenging behaviours, it will be necessary to target potential foster carers who already have experience working with young people and have an awareness of therapeutic methods of managing and supporting them in the ways needed.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have proved successful in reaching a wide audience, whilst we are also targeting prospective carers to be targeted via platforms such as LinkedIn, as well as advertising through trade/specialist publications. To date we have used a range of specialist publications such as [SEN magazine](#), [QA Education](#), and [Metropolitan/Police Life](#), alongside local publications including the [Hackney Gazette](#), [Hackney Citizen](#), [Hackney Today](#) and the [South East Star](#). We will also continue to invest in community-specific advertising, such as the [Jewish Tribune](#) and [Hamodia](#) in order to reach the Jewish and Orthodox Jewish communities, as well as Gaydio radio and LGBTQI publications, in addition to having a presence at Pride events, including Black Pride. We recognise the need to ensure a diverse range of mediums are used in order to ensure we continue to reach a relevant and diverse audience. Therefore new outlets and approaches will remain under review.

There are some areas that we would particularly like to expand our portfolio of foster carers, including:

- Orthodox Jewish carers, particularly for older children;
- Parent and child carers;
- Carers for adolescents with complex needs;
- LGBTQ community carers.

However, our experience to date suggests that a broad range of recruitment activities has brought more success in terms of recruiting a diverse pool of carers, than recruitment initiatives with a narrow focus. We have found in campaigns that the prospect of fostering can particularly appeal to those:

- A. Thinking about changing their vocation;
- B. Considering retirement; and
- C. Who may have been out of work, but who were previously experienced in the fields of working with children and young people.

In order to ensure our fostering offer remains competitive with other local authorities, over the following year we are hoping to secure agreement for Council tax exemption for Hackney carers and to progress ideas for other benefits, such as discounts on local leisure activities.

## **Priority 2: Increase the use of in-house carers over alternative care arrangements**

In April 2018 we introduced the role of Consultant Matching Officer, to address the high vacancy rates for our in-house carers, which was **37%** of our in-house carers. It is **now 7%**. At the end of 2021, we reflected that we could potentially use the same approach for out of hours matching. In

December 2021 we began a pilot to offer an out of hours matching service with in-house carers, for children who needed alternative homes in an emergency, with the Matching Consultant on call on weeknights between 5pm and 12am. Prior to this, none of our in-house carers had been willing to be on our Emergency Duty list for out of hour care arrangements. However, an analysis of 29 care arrangements made out of hours between January and September 2021 highlighted the following:

- Most requests for searches for alternative care arrangements took place in the early evenings on weekdays, generally between 5pm and 10pm, with very few being made in the early hours of the morning;
- Most of the children needing an alternative care arrangement in an emergency were not already in care, were a variety of ages and did not obviously present with complex needs;
- Ten of the 29 children placed in an emergency remained in the home they were placed in to the time of the review.

We project the total cost for this 3 month pilot is a maximum of **£3,000**. It would take **only 1 child to be placed in house** over an arrangement with an IFA for a period of **4 weeks** to make this proposal cost effective. To date we have placed two children out of hours with inhouse foster carers and both children have been in the care arrangement for longer than 4 weeks. Feedback has been received from EDT practitioners that having a dedicated person to focus on matching with inhouse carers out of hours relieves pressure for them.

### Priority 3: Expand the use of Supported Lodgings hosts

Hackney's Supported Lodgings Scheme launched in 2018 as an additional option for young people preparing to leave care. The aim of this scheme was to offer young people aged 16+ the opportunity to live in the home of an approved person who will help them prepare for independent living. This provides a safe and supportive environment where a young person can develop the practical skills and emotional maturity to move on and cope with living independently. Further details can be found in the [Supported Lodgings Policy](#).

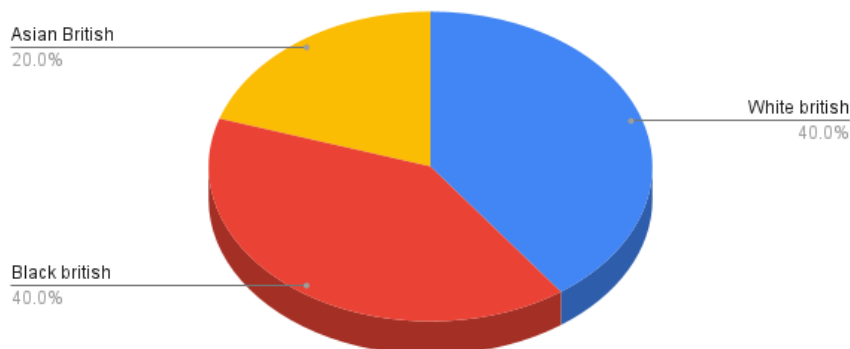
Supported Lodgings	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Enquiries	13	106	68	11
Approvals	1	5	2	4
De-registrations	0	0	0	1

As of March 2022, we have 7 young people living in supported lodgings arrangements. At present Hackney has 12 households that provide supported lodgings, two of which were initially assessed as foster carers, but have since had their approval status changed to include the supported lodgings provision. The majority of supported lodgings hosts households are single female carers (80%) and 90% of these households are working professionals: mostly in the fields of law (30%)

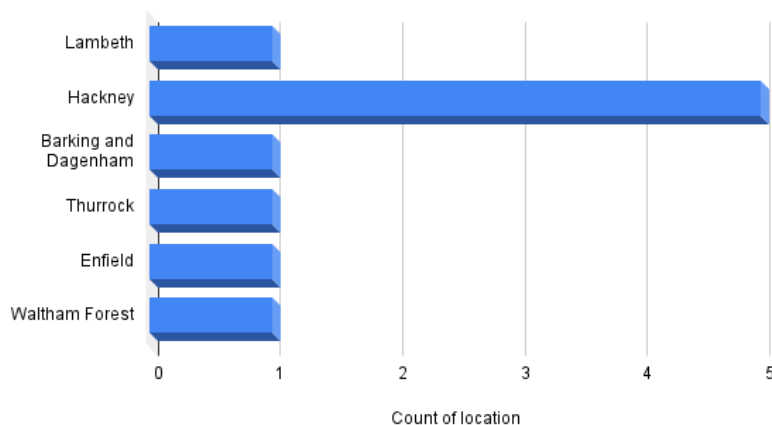


and education (30%). The majority of the supported lodgings hosts are either White or Black British (40%) with 50% of hosts living in Hackney.

*Ethnicity of Supported Lodgings Hosts*



*Location of Hackney Supported Lodgings Homes*



Our target for the forthcoming year is to recruit a minimum of a further 3 Supported Lodgings hosts and continue to promote this as an alternative to supported accommodation, where appropriate.

As the need for Foster Carers exceeds that of supported lodgings hosts, adverts to promote supported lodgings will run occasionally throughout the year. The team will continue to promote it to candidates that contact the service about fostering, as an alternative option, where appropriate.

**Priority 4: Improve the retention rates of our foster carers through high quality support and training**

***Our fostering support offer***

We know that the role of a foster carer can be extremely challenging and sadly, each year, many foster carers nationally feel they can no longer continue. We have a range of support systems in place for foster carers, in addition to the individual statutory support and supervision they receive from their allocated fostering social worker. This includes:

- The Hackney Foster Carers' Forum, which is held every 3 months;
- The Hackney Foster Carer Council, which organises 4 support groups per year, as well as other trips and activities for our network of foster families;
- Membership of the North London Fostering Consortium, who provide a Parent and Child support group, run by Enfield Council;
- A Male Carers support group run by our fostering service every other month;
- A Foster Carers Therapeutic Support Group run by our fostering service fortnightly;
- The Fostering Network provides all our carers with a membership to access independent support as and when they need it;
- Reflective Fostering Programme, run by our fostering service, under the oversight of the Anna Freud Centre and University of Hertfordshire - run weekly over 12 weeks.
- Buddying support: All carers in assessment have the option to be allocated a buddy through Stage 2 of the assessment process. We have a commitment to offer newly approved carers further buddy support for the first 4 weeks of their first care arrangement, although work needs to be undertaken to further promote this offer;
- Receipt of a quarterly Hackney Foster Carers newsletter, which contains information on service updates, training, support groups, good news stories, celebration of achievements and a feature on culture and identity.

Feedback from carers is that they are not always clear about the wide range of potential support that is available to them from the start of their fostering journeys. Information on the fostering support offer has been updated on the Council website -

<https://hackney.gov.uk/support-for-hackney-foster-carers> - and we are continuing to explore ways to develop our web-based information available for foster carers, for example, through the Virtual School app.

### ***The Mockingbird Model***

The Mockingbird Model was also introduced in 2019. The Mockingbird Model originates in America. Within the model, between 6 and 10 foster families in a local area are brought together in what's called a 'constellation'. At the centre of each constellation there's a 'hub home', so it's a little like 'satellite' foster homes revolving around the centre. This 'hub home' is exactly what it says: a home that's lived in by a specially trained carer who's there to support other families in the constellation.

In October 2021 our second Mockingbird Constellation was launched, with the third Constellation launched in December 2021. The focus in 2022/23 will be to embed the two newest Constellations and, towards the end of the year, we hope to be in a position to launch our fourth Constellation. Long-term, our vision is that all Hackney foster carers will be a part of a Mockingbird Constellation.

### ***Training and development opportunities***

Our foster carers also benefit from a wide range of training, tailored to various levels of knowledge, skills and experience. All prospective carers must complete a mandatory programme

of 'skills to foster' courses during the recruitment process. Once carers have been approved, they become Level 1 carers, which again has a mandatory programme of training (see appendix for details). Once the mandatory training at Level 1 is complete and they have completed their Training Support and Development standards workbook, carers automatically become Level 2 carers. This is generally ratified at their First annual review. Additional training is then available at Level 2 (see appendix for details).

In order to become a Level 3 carer, carers must evidence the following:

- Ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of child development and attachment;
- Ability to recognise and appropriately respond to children who have challenging, complex emotional and behavioural needs; or ability to provide high quality care to children who are registered disabled;
- Ability to support planned and unplanned endings, working closely with professionals and clinical service;
- Ability to look after children known to have been sexually abused;
- Evidence of completion of a recognised training related to the care of children and young people, such as NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce (or equivalent).

**OR** evidence of a practical route to level 3. This would include evidencing a significant contribution to the recruitment, support and retention of foster carers, including one or more of the following additional responsibilities for a minimum period of one year including:

- Mentoring, advising or supporting other foster or connected carers;
- Significant contribution to training and development of other foster or connected carers i.e. co-facilitating or leading a workshop or course and contributing to the "Skills to Foster" sessions;
- Significant activity in the recruitment of foster or connected carers;
- Contribution to the retention of foster carers through running events and support groups.

In response to feedback from our carers, at the beginning of 2022 we opened up the possibility of connected carers progressing to Level 3.

Each year we have ambitious targets for supporting our carers to move up through the levels, as we are committed to investing in their training and development. We hope to increase our numbers of Level 1 to Level 2 carers by at least 8% per year and Level 2 to Level 3 carers by at least 4 per cent per year.

### ***Nurturing Attachments***

All our carers are encouraged to book on to this 12 week course over time. The Nurturing Attachments is a programme that has been developed to help foster and adoptive parents strengthen their relationships with the child and support children who have experienced developmental traumas. The course is run by our in-house clinical service. The entry level of this

training course is also being adapted to support newly approved foster carers in understanding traumatised children and what they can do when working with trauma.

Our development priorities for rolling out training for carers this year are training on the following areas:

- **Anti-racist parenting:** As a service we have adopted a clear position in relation to what it means to deliver [anti-racist parenting](#) and recognise the importance of ensuring we have a shared understanding with our carers;
- **Trauma-informed practice:** We know that most of the children in our care have complex histories of trauma and that caring for this in this context can be challenging. We plan to work closely with our Foster Care Council in 2022/3 to think about what trauma-informed practice looks like in a fostering context and offer further training and support to carers and the fostering service on delivering this;
- **Education and Health Care Plans:** The processes related to Education and Health Care Plans can be complicated and we want to support our carers to understand these, so that they are well placed to advocate for the children in their care.
- **Gender identity:** We recognise that a small but significant proportion of our looked after children have questions about their gender identity and these can be complex for them - and their carers - to navigate. We are therefore keen to offer further specialist training and support to carers in this area.

### **Responding to feedback**

In March 2022 we rolled out our first Annual Foster Carers Survey. Forty-three carers (or 25% of our 170 fostering households) responded. Through this survey, our carers gave us a sense of what they wanted us to prioritise in the year ahead.

Priority	How many indicated this?	What are we planning in response?
Champion the voice of foster carers in the professional network	81.4%	We are making ongoing efforts to include the voice of fostering in key forums e.g. inviting carers to events like staff Conferences and All Service Meetings.
Improve the support offer for carers outside of office hours	53.5%	As detailed above, our out of hours matching pilot is underway. We are also exploring the possibility of piloting an extended fostering duty line, to offer additional advice and support to foster carers where needed outside of standard officer hours.
Develop the training offer for foster carers	53.5%	Our training plans are detailed above.

Strengthen opportunities for peer support between foster carers.	44.2%	Ongoing plans to roll out the Mockingbird Model are detailed above, which offers strong peer support to those involved.  From May 2022 the Matching Consultant will lead on coordinating buddying arrangements for new carers, to ensure these are consistently made.
Expand the Mockingbird Model	39.5%	This is planned.
Increase the level of supervision and support for carers	18.6%	All carers receive supervision and support in line with statutory guidance, but - as detailed above - we are keen to continue to promote and expand our additional offers of support, for example, through the therapeutic fostering group, the fathers group and the activities of HFCC.

In terms of other feedback:

- 94% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I understand the purpose of the foster carer's annual review and find the yearly meeting helpful to reflect on my fostering position'***, within only 1 carer who strongly disagreed with this;
- 81.4% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'Supervision helps me understand the child's care plan and my role in helping to achieve this'***, although 3 respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 81.4% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I feel the training offer for foster carers is relevant and supports me to do my job better'***, although 2 respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 79.1% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I feel happy with the level of support and supervision I receive from the fostering service'***, although 2 respondents indicated that they strongly disagreed with this;
- 79.1% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I feel well supported to understand and respond to the identity needs of the children and young people in my care, for example, in relation to their cultural heritage, religion, sexuality, gender identity, etc'***, although 2 respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 76.8% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'My experience of support in a time of crisis has been timely and meaningful'***, although 4 respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 76.7% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I feel my role as a foster carer is well respected and understood by the fostering service'***, although 2 respondents indicated that they strongly disagreed with this;

- 76.4% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I am well supported to understand and respond to the complex needs of children or young people in my care'***, although 2 respondents indicated that they strongly disagreed with this;
- 72.1% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I am well supported to have my voice heard in the decision-making for children and young people in my care'***, although 4 respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 72.1% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I understand the processes around managing allegations that might be made against me, or investigating standards of care issues and feel that I will be supported by the fostering service in the event of such'***, although 4 respondents indicated that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 69.8% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I feel my role as a foster carer is well respected and understood by other professionals'***, although 2 respondents indicated that either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;
- 60.4% indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ***'I am given all available information about the histories of the children and young people that I care for, that enable me to care for them well'***, although 37.2% of respondents indicated that either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this;

Overall, the results indicated that there are high levels of satisfaction with the fostering service, although there is a small but significant minority who do not feel as well supported as they should, which needs to be addressed. Other specific areas highlighted that require further work are:

- **Ensuring carers have sufficient information about children's histories:** A new direct work tool has been developed for foster carers to complete prior to Looked After Child Reviews, which includes a specific question about whether they have had sufficient information about the child's history. We also plan to promote a greater focus on the sharing of chronologies at the point of a child moving into a new home.
- **Ensuring carers' voices are heard and their roles respected:** We are committed to offering ongoing opportunities for foster carers and practitioners to undertake joint training. Hackney Foster Carers Council are keen to develop training for children's social workers alongside the Fostering Service on their role as carers, to be rolled out this year. We are planning to hold further Open Space Events: historically, these have been very successful forums where carers and staff come together and do some blue sky thinking about the development of the service.
- **Ensuring carers understand the processes for managing allegations that might be made against them, or standards of care issues, and that they feel supported by the service in these circumstances:** The Fostering Service Manager and the Hackney Foster Carers Council are establishing a Working Group in May 2022 to review the existing Allegations Procedure and consider how it may be improved.
- **Ensuring that the support offered to carers in times of crisis is timely and robust:** Carers are keen to feel that their voices are heard and respected, particularly where they feel more support is needed for a child and care arrangement, to try and avoid

arrangements ending in an unplanned way, in situations where they are left to shoulder the blame. We are continuing to explore with both in-house clinical services the support offer to foster care arrangements, in order to clarify the remit of this, as well as the scope for strengthening the commissioning arrangements we have in place for putting in additional support to looked after children, for example, from youth workers, where needed.

Foster carers were also asked to comment in the survey on how they felt the needs of children and young people were being met by the networks around them. The results were as follows:

<b>Area of children and young people's need</b>	<b>% of positive feedback</b>	<b>% of negative feedback</b>
Maintaining positive relationships with loved ones	86.1%	4.6%
Physical health	76.7%	2.3%
Challenging any experiences of racism or discrimination	72.1%	4.6%
Mental health	69.4%	9.3%
Understanding their histories	68.7%	7%
Education	62.8%	9.3%

NB Carers were also given the opportunity to indicate that they neither agreed nor disagreed that children's needs in these areas were well met.

#### *Learning from exit interviews*

We are committed to learning from our foster carers about what we are doing well and what we can do better. This year, for every foster carer that is deregistered, the Fostering Service Manager will offer a formal exit interview, as an opportunity to gather feedback in order to support the ongoing development of our service.

## Appendix 1: Fostering Training Offer

### Skills to Foster Training

Over the course of the successive lockdowns the delivery of Skills to Foster Course was changed from a three day course to a two day course with the additional Bitesize sessions, requiring completion in advance of the two day course.

#### Bitesize sessions

- Bitesize day 1 - What do Foster carers Do?
- Bitesize day 2 - Life story work
- Bitesize day 3 - Attachment

#### Skills to Foster content

- Identity
- Equality & Diversity
- Children's experience in care
- Importance of words
- Team around the child
- Children and the Law
- Care plan and placements
- Meeting with care leavers
- Understanding difficult behaviours
- Promoting positive behaviours - PACE
- Safer caring
- Impact of abuse
- Placement stability

### Foster Carers Training Offer

#### Level 1

- Safeguarding and understanding risk
- Record keeping and writing
- Safer caring and allegations
- First aid training
- Diversity training
- Understanding attachment (0–3)
- Understanding attachment (school-aged children)
- Understanding attachment (adolescents)
- TSD
- Looking after a family member
- The role of men in fostering

#### Level 2

- Facilitating and Supporting Contact



- Caring for a baby (new)
- Life story work
- Working with Black African Children in Foster Care
- Communicating with young people about sex and relationship
- Moving In Moving On
- Introduction to Restorative Practice
- The role of men in fostering
- Awareness & Understanding of Gangs and County Lines
- Preparing Young People for Independence
- Being a self aware foster carer
- Supporting children with loss and bereavement
- Managing sexualised behaviour
- Nurturing Attachments

### **Level 3**

- Positive relationships and a sense of belonging
- Trauma informed training (new)
- Fostering refresher for level 3 carers
- The role of men in fostering
- Reflection & Complex Behaviour
- Supporting children with loss and bereavement