

**SOUTHWARK COUNCIL
ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT
2012-13**



Southwark Council Annual Fostering Report 2012-13

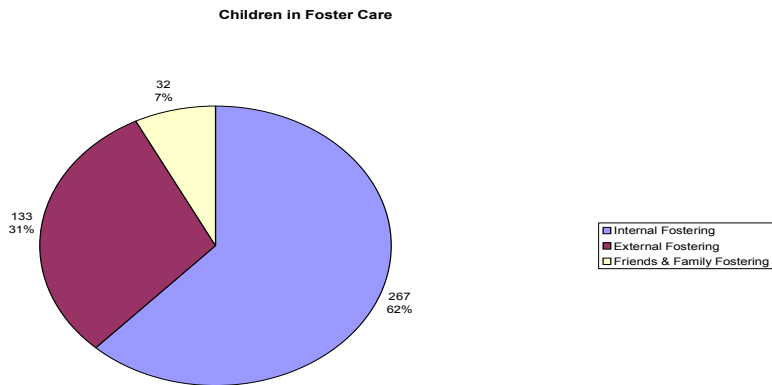
Introduction

The work of the Fostering Service is governed by statutory regulations, which require that Elected Members be informed of the Service's activity on a regular basis. This also requires the presentation of an annual report to help Elected Members fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents for Looked After Children in Southwark.

The fostering team's core business as part of Children's Services is to:

- provide quality foster care placements for Southwark's Looked After Children.
- recruit, assess, train and support a suitable and diverse range of foster carers to provide quality care for Looked After Children.

There are currently 565 Looked After Children in Southwark.



In house placements

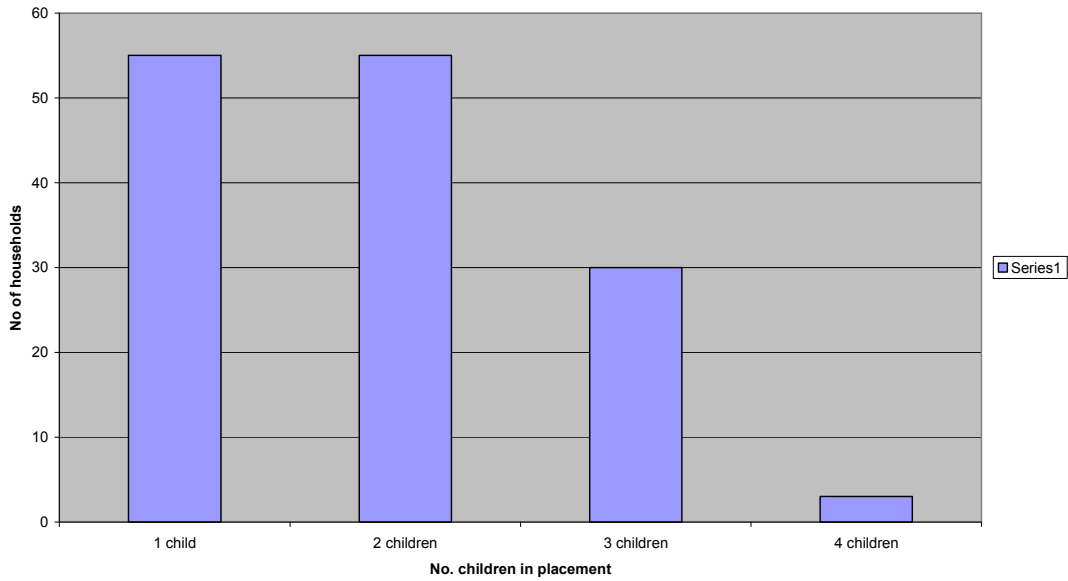
The fostering team has a total number of 143 internal fostering households who are able to provide placements for 267(62%) Looked After children. There are 133 (31%) Looked After Children placed with external fostering agencies and 32 (7%) placed with Family & Friends carers (7%).

uring 2012/13 the fostering team lost 5 fostering households due to retirements, resignations and terminations of approvals.

Short Breaks Care

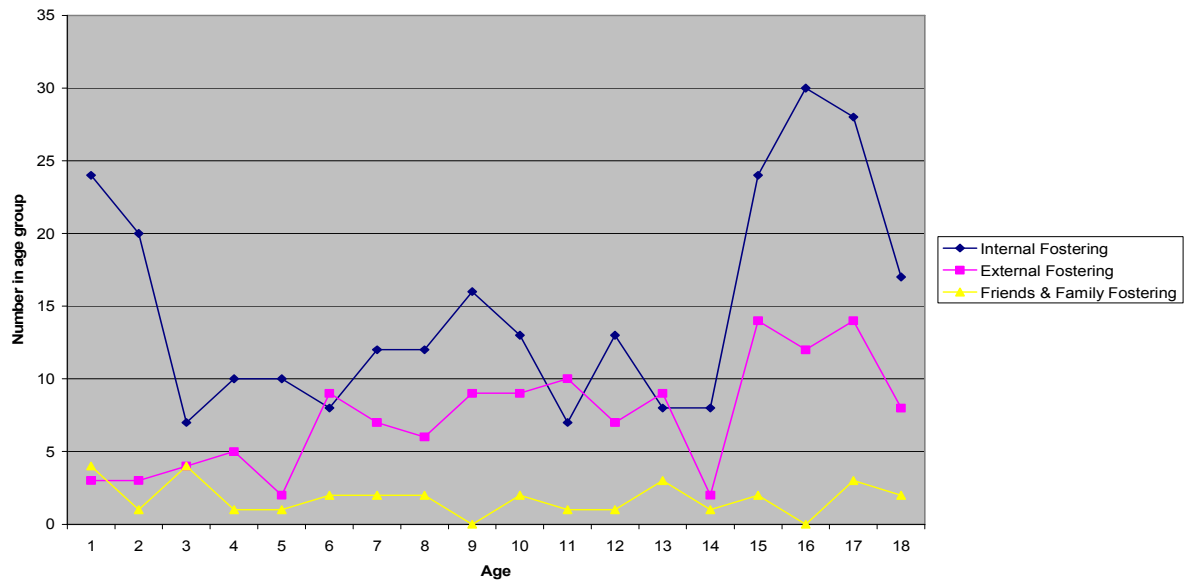
Southwark has 22 Family Link approved carers providing short breaks care for 24 children with disabilities.

Fostering Households by numbers of children in placement

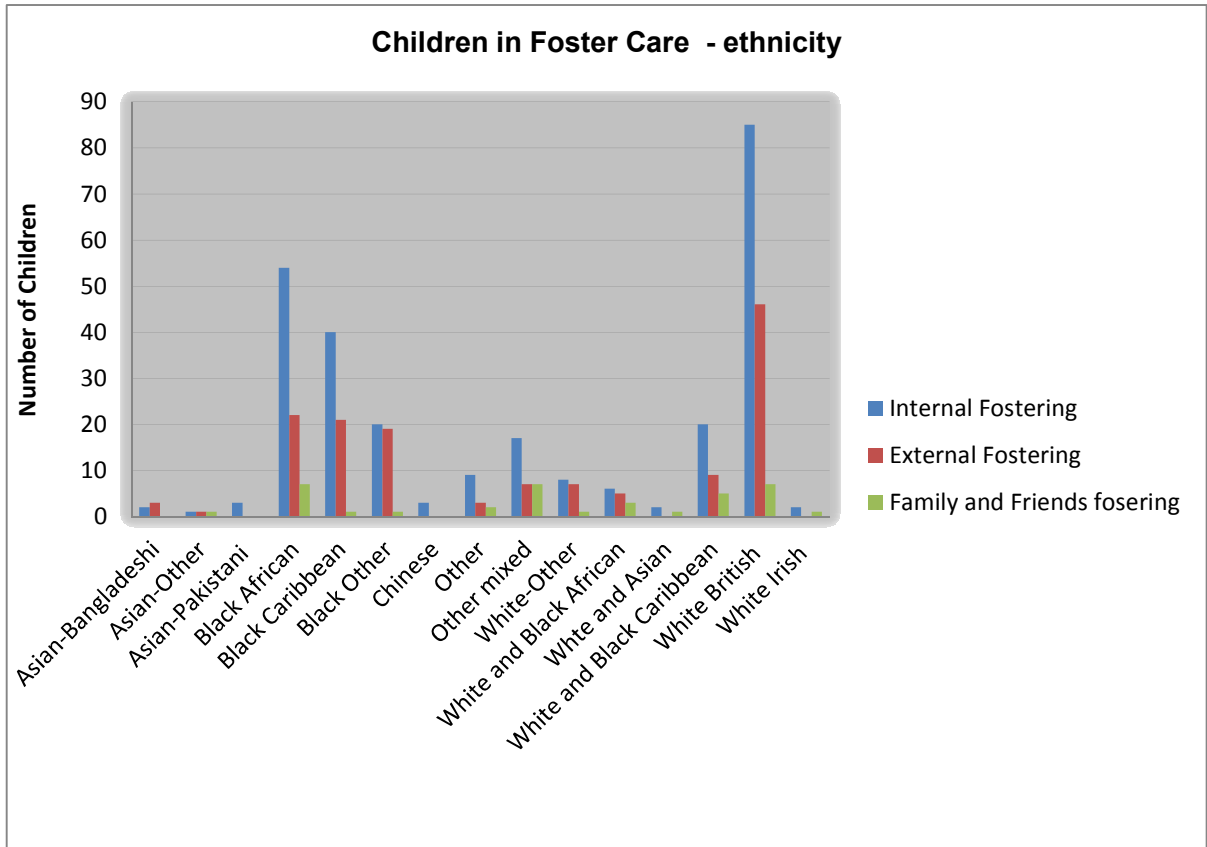


55 Looked After children (21%) are cared for by internal foster carers approved for one child; while 110 Looked After Children (41%) are cared for in households are approved to care for two children, which is the highest of the 4 groups. 90 children (34%) are placed with carers approved to care for 3 children and 12 children (4%) are placed in fostering households approved to care for 4 children, usually sibling groups.

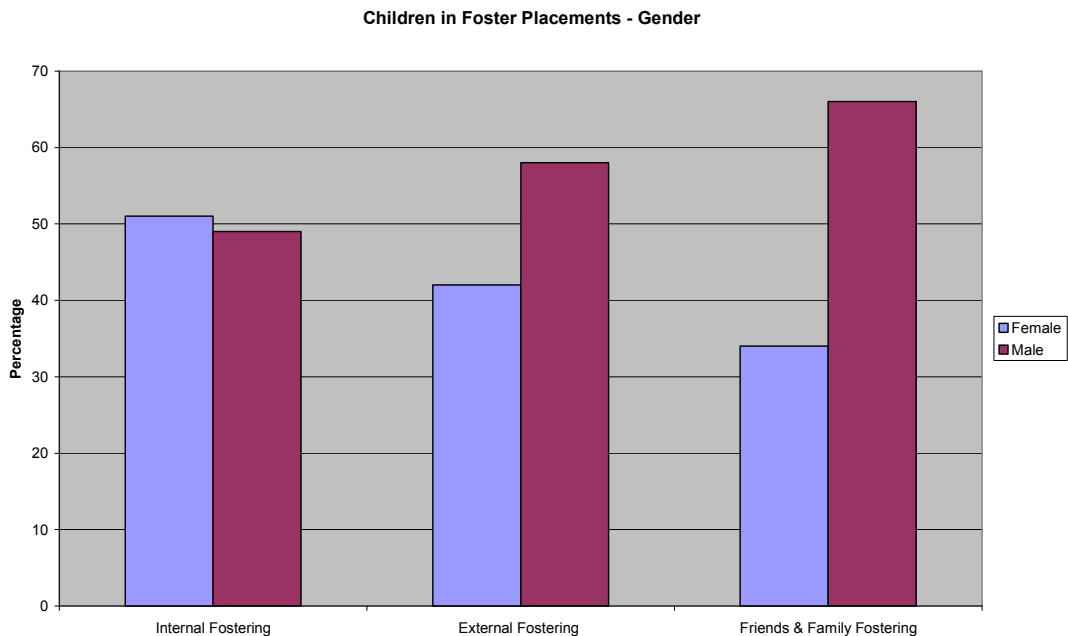
Children in Foster Care - age distribution



Internal foster carers provide care for 62% of all children placed in foster care with a significantly higher proportion throughout the age range. 77% of children aged 1 and under and 70% of all 16 year olds are placed internally. External foster carers provide care for a slightly higher proportion of 6, 11 and 13 year olds compared with the other two groups. Figures for Family and Friends carers remain consistently low throughout.



There is a significantly higher proportion of white British (85) black African (53) and black Caribbean (40) children placed with internal foster carers than either external or Family and Friends carers. Family and Friend foster carers are represented across the majority of all ethnicities.



A significantly higher percentage of male children are placed with Family and Friends carers (66%) and external carers (58%) than with internal carers (49%). However more female children are placed with internal carers (51%) when compared with external carers (42%) or Family and Friends carers (34%).

Training

A comprehensive training programme for foster carers offering 26 different courses was developed in 2012/13. In addition foster carers are able attend courses advertised on the My Learning site, enabling them to train with social workers where appropriate. Responsibility for coordinating training for carers has been transferred to the Learning and Development Unit with support from the Fostering Managers utilizing their knowledge and experience to help co-ordinate the training programme.

While final figures are not yet available feedback from training suggests that foster cares are attending training courses ranging from 'basic induction' to 'helping to move children on'. It is evident that foster carers are keen to develop the necessary skills to provide a high standard of care for children. For those carers who are unable to attend training, Supervising Social Workers offer individual learning sessions.

Care Link Therapeutic Service

CareLink provide additional therapeutic support to foster carers to help them understand and confidently manage the behaviours of children in their care. Referrals are made by the Fostering Supervising Social Workers and the CareLink therapist work in partnership with them in providing support. One of the fostering Supervising Social Worker's is now based at CareLink to support this work, which foster carers are finding extremely helpful.

Foster Carer Recruitment

We have struggled to meet our target of 20 new foster carer approvals during 2012-13, with only 9 carers being approved. There are however 10 assessments still being progressed. Out of these 5 are waiting for further medical follow up. It is not unusual that up to 50% of our assessments require further medical information ranging from relatively minor information to that of a complex nature.

During 2012-13 the recruitment manager received a total number of 151 initial enquiries from members of the public interested in becoming foster carers, only 63 went on to complete application forms. Out of these:

40 initial visits were undertaken by the Recruitment Manager and of these visits:

11 applicants were assessed as being unsuitable

29 applicants were given forms to complete to progress to the next stage. Out these:

8 did not return the application forms, despite several calls to discuss

21 returned their forms and were allocated for assessment

Pre-Approval Training (Skills to Foster)

Two Skills to Foster courses took place in May and November 2012. Of the 21 applicants who took part four withdrew and one couple were found to be unsuitable.

Applicants submitted to the panel

10 assessments have been submitted to the fostering panel. Of these 1 assessment was deferred prior to the panel (the applicants subsequently withdrew their application) 1 assessment was deferred at panel, but has since been approved.

Of the remainder 6 applicants were ceased during assessment due to adverse CRB issues, adverse local authority information, and issues around management of own children arising and a couple separating during their assessment process.

5 applicants withdrew due to changing their mind after meeting a new partner, family bereavement, personal reasons and unhappy with the delay at going to panel.

There have now been 9 approvals since April 2012 offering 13 placements for children. There has also been 3 Family and Friends and 4 Family Link households.

Some factors for consideration

One of the main reasons expressed during the initial enquiry stage for not progressing applications is that Southwark allowances are lower than its neighbouring authorities. Southwark is currently working on a more competitive allowance scheme, which will shortly be sent out for consultation. If this is indeed a key factor we should expect to see an overall increase in applications during 2013-14.

The target for 2013-14 will be to recruit 25 internal foster carers over the next year. A range of options are now being considered to progress this plan:

- Financial reward to the workforce, or current carers whose friends or family recommendations lead to new approvals.
- A new communications strategy to include more wide ranging publicity such as:
 - a) foster carer and a supervising social Worker vignettes that can be added to the Website,
 - b) recorded phone messages while customers are waiting to be put through to services advertising on the back of buses travelling both within and outside of the borough
 - c) use of schools parents evenings, leisure centres, churches and community markets and events

Another option currently being considered is to commission an external agency to recruit new foster carers setting a target of 40 new carers within the next year. There is evidence from campaigns run in other authorities that this approach can be successful.

Southwark Foster Care Association (SFCA)

SFCA comprises Southwark Foster Carers who meet regularly to consider issues affecting foster carers such as fostering rates, support and training for carers and how the service can be improved. The Association is very active and provides an important avenue for the department to communicate directly with foster carers over changes in policy and strategy. It also provides an opportunity for foster carers to raise any issues of concern they may have. Recent topics have included the impact of Welfare Reform, changes to fostering rates, and how the department investigates allegations against carers. The department recognises the importance of the SFCA and is exploring ways to build on existing methods of communication.

Fostering Panel

In line with The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the associated National Minimum Standards for Foster Care, Southwark's fostering panel is organised to ensure that appropriate recommendations are made about the approval and reviews of foster carers.

The changes to guidance presented the service with an opportunity to review the panel tenure as members no longer have a maximum or minimum tenure. A recent decision was made to refresh the panel and this process has begun with the appointment of a new panel chair. The new chair is expected to take up her new position in May following an induction and panel training day. We will also be seeking to recruit more panel members from a range of backgrounds and key professions.

Inspection

The Fostering Service was required by regulation to be inspected by Ofsted once every three years. Southwark was last inspected in December 2011, when we received an overall rating of 'Good'.

Ofsted judged that the service was good at helping children to stay healthy, ensured they achieved well and enjoyed what they did, and made a positive contribution. The service was also good at protecting children from harm and neglect. Foster carers were well supported and the service had some outstanding features.

Finance

	Gross Spend
Fostering Allowances	£4,899,552.96
Other	£232,652.32
Staff Costs	£1,080,443.71
Total	£6,212,648.99

Average weekly cost per child

Internal foster placement	£438.05
External foster placement	£850- £900

Future plans for the Fostering Service in 2013-14

The challenge to recruit internal foster carers remains high on the service agenda. This is the single most important area of need within the service as the number of Looked After Children population increases. The Supervising Social Workers have worked hard throughout the year to support and retain our current cohort of internal carers, however over the next two years some of our older carers are likely to retire and are not taking on any new placements leading up to this. In order to ensure our Looked After Children can remain living within their local community we need to provide sufficient placements to meet their needs. The Fostering Service will continue to work on recruitment and will learn from other Local Authorities' examples of recruitment and best practice. Consideration is also being given to how the SFCA can help improve recruitment as word of mouth is often a successful way of bringing new carers into the service.