

Item No. 9.	Classification: Open	Date: 11 February 2014	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Progress Report in Respect of Fostering Recruitment	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		Children Looked After	
From:		Director of Children's and Adults' Services	

RECOMMENDATION

1. Members to note the information provided in this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. Members will be aware that Southwark engaged NRS recruitment agency under contract in June 2013 to recruit local foster carers for Southwark's Looked After Children. This was due to the pressure on fostering resources in Southwark as the increase in fostering households had not kept pace with the placement demand. This was the case in authorities across the country leading local authorities to place children with foster carers provided by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) often further from home and at a greater cost than in house placements.
3. Southwark currently has 545 Looked After Children, 257 of whom are currently placed in 171 in-house fostering households. NRS was contracted to provide 50 new fostering households within a 12-month period. The focus was to be white carers who could care for children between the ages of 0-4 and 11-15 year olds. The request was also for carers who could care for sibling groups of 2 plus children.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. NRS have used a previously tested recruitment drive that includes leaflet drops, back of bus advertising and banners in key places to target foster carers. They have held a number of information sessions in the borough and also Skills to Foster 3 day training days for people interested in becoming foster carers. Successful applicants are then assessed within a 10-12 week period, rather than the traditional 20-32 week period that has often led to applicants dropping out. The assessments are quality assured within their agency prior to Southwark undertaking a quality assurance process.
5. At this point in time 10 fostering households have been approved broken down into the following categories:
 - 3 permanent carers

- 7 short/long term carers
 - 6 approved to care for children 0-12 years old
 - 1 approved to care for children 3-18 years old
 - 3 approved to care for children 0-18 years old
 - 9 are approved for either gender
 - 1 approved for a female placement to fit their own family
 - 7 approved to care for a sibling group of 2 or more children
 - 3 approved for 1 child
 - 2 are experienced foster carers transferring from an IFA to in House
 - 8 are new fostering households
6. Seven children have been placed with new foster carers since approval and the two experienced foster carers, previously with Independent Fostering Agencies currently have Southwark children placed with them. The remaining carers will begin training and will have children placed with them as soon as possible.
7. Over the next 2-3 months, 12 foster carers will be presented to the fostering panel for approval. There are currently another 4 foster carers undergoing the first stage of their assessment. These carers will be presented to the May fostering panel.

Additional factors

8. It is unlikely that NRS will meet its 50 fostering household target by June 2014, however there are a number of reasons for this, which have been beyond their control. There was an initial delay in agreeing the communication strategy and organising the telephone and email contact through Southwark's website. This meant that people could not access NRS directly and had to come through Southwark first causing some delay in the process. NRS offered to provide a website page for Southwark, which was not accepted due to the corporate policy around what can be displayed on the site. There were also some issues relating to approving copy. There was further delay in medical information being returned by consultants when Southwark's medical advisor requested additional health information.
9. These issues have now largely been resolved and the increased number of carers in assessment confirms this. NRS have remained positive throughout and have every confidence that they will be able to deliver the 50 foster carers with a little more time. It is clearly in their interest as they only receive payment once a carer has been approved at panel.
10. Monthly performance reports covering all recruitment activity is discussed during monthly meetings and a good working relationship has developed with lessons learnt. A number of areas are still to be developed such as changes to the fostering website, which is now underway and which is in line with NRS' publicity campaign. We therefore envisage a further increase in applicants and approvals over the coming months if the contract can be renewed.

Next steps

11. Southwark plans to focus on permanency for those Looked After Children in need of permanent homes. A review of children placed with IFA foster carers who are waiting for long-term placements is also taking place. Once new carers are approved, these children can be matched and placed with permanent carers in line with their care plans. It is positive to note that of the foster carers approved to date, 3 would like to offer permanent homes to Looked After Children and will be matched with children waiting for permanent placements.
12. Southwark has reviewed and increased its fostering allowance, which is currently out for consultation. It is envisaged that this increase will lead to additional interest as it brings it in line with some neighbouring authorities.

Policy implications

13. There are no policy implications.

Community impact statement

14. Southwark fostering service gives due consideration to race, gender, disability, culture, religion and sexual orientation in relation to children being placed and adults applying to become foster carers, throughout the recruitment, assessment, and training process.

Resource implications

15. NRS is paid by results; therefore it remains the case that there should be substantial savings resulting from placing more children with in-house foster carers.
16. An increase in the number of in-house foster carers will require an increase in social work support. The service will use the current quota of social workers; however will need to recruit two additional social work posts over the next 12 months as the number of in-house carers increase. The savings realised from the use of in-house as opposed to IFA foster carers will transfer to the recruitment budget to meet salary cost.

Consultation

17. No consultation has been necessary.

Legal and financial implications

18. The director of legal services and strategic director of finance and corporate services noted the content of the Gateway report, containing information about the recruitment agency contract and therefore no further advice has been sought.

Head of Procurement

19. The recruitment agency's contract is overseen by procurement.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Director, Children's Social Care	
Report Author	Shirley Walker, Interim Service Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	13 February 2014	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Legal Services	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	13 February 2014	