

Item No. 11.	Classification: Open	Date: 3 November 2014	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Fostering Service Annual Report 2013 - 2014	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		Looked After Children by the London Borough of Southwark	
From:		Director, Children's Social Care	

RECOMMENDATION

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

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. This report provides details of fostering activity over the financial year April 2013 - March 2014. The fostering team's core business as part of Children's Services is to:
 - provide quality foster care placements for Children Looked After in Southwark
 - recruit, assess, train and support a suitable and diverse range of foster carers to provide quality care for Children Looked After.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

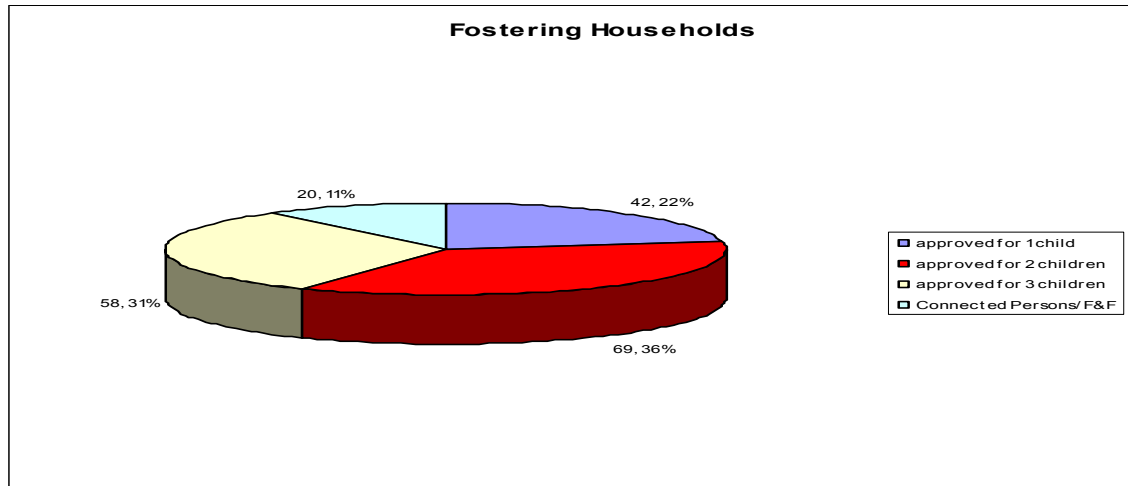
The Fostering Service

3. The fostering service is committed to supporting foster carers to provide good quality stable placements for Looked After Children. The service is made up of two separate fostering teams of seven supervising social workers and a team manager. There are also two administrators who support the team's duty and fostering panel systems. Each supervising social worker holds an average caseload of between 15 and 18 foster carers. The Supervising Social Workers also provide additional support to the children and young people placed with foster carers.
4. A fostering recruitment manager is responsible for liaising and quality assuring all fostering assessments completed by NRS, the recruitment agency commissioned to recruit new foster carers for Southwark.
5. The work of the service has increased due to new approvals of Connected Persons carers as well as in house foster carers. This has brought with it the challenge of meeting the individual demands of different parts of the service. Supervising Social Workers are involved in training events and facilitating coffee mornings that enable foster carers to meet and support each other. They also take part in the daily duty system and 'out of hours' service for foster carers who may need advice or support.

Children Looked After

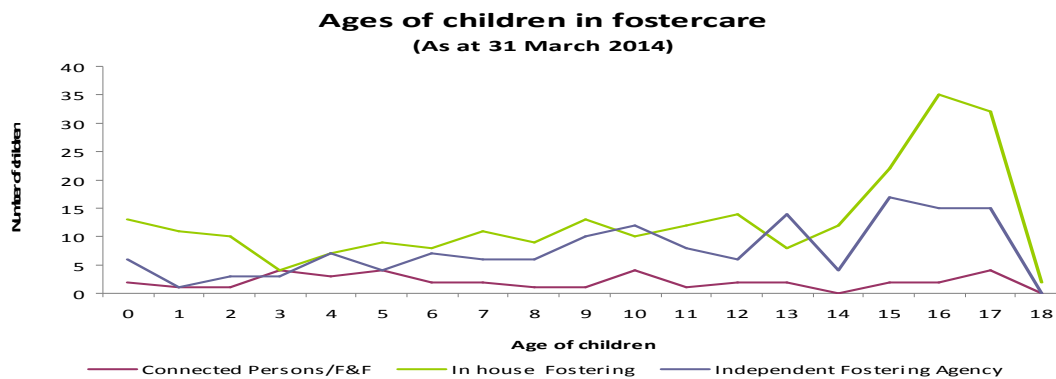
6. The overall number of Children Looked After in Southwark fell from 562 (2012/3) to 550 (2013/14). This is a reduction of 12 children (2.14%) over the course of the year.

Fostering households



7. During the course of the year, 284 children were Looked After in 169 in-house fostering and 20 Connected Persons (Family and Friends) households.
8. In-house fostering households are approved for one, two, or a sibling group of three children. Those approved to care for two children (69) can provide care for one child, two unrelated children or a sibling group of two children. In house fostering households approved to care for three children (58) can be just as flexible, however these carers are generally used to care for sibling groups to prevent separation. During 2013/14, 19 out of 23 sibling groups, involving 40 children were placed together.
9. A smaller number of carers are approved to care for one child (42) the majority of whom are young children or babies.
10. There are occasions when it may not be appropriate to place another child in a household approved for more than one child due to the needs of the child in placement. Although this may mean a carer approved for two children carrying a vacancy, careful matching of a child with a fostering household is likely to reduce the risk of disruption and placement breakdown.

Ages of children in foster care



11. In-house fostering households provide care for 58% of all children placed in foster care. While Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) households care for more 10 year olds (46%) and 13 year olds (58%) in-house fostering households care for a higher percentage of children across the age range. This is most evident among the older cohort of 14 (75%) 15 (53%) 16 (67%) and 17 year olds (62%).

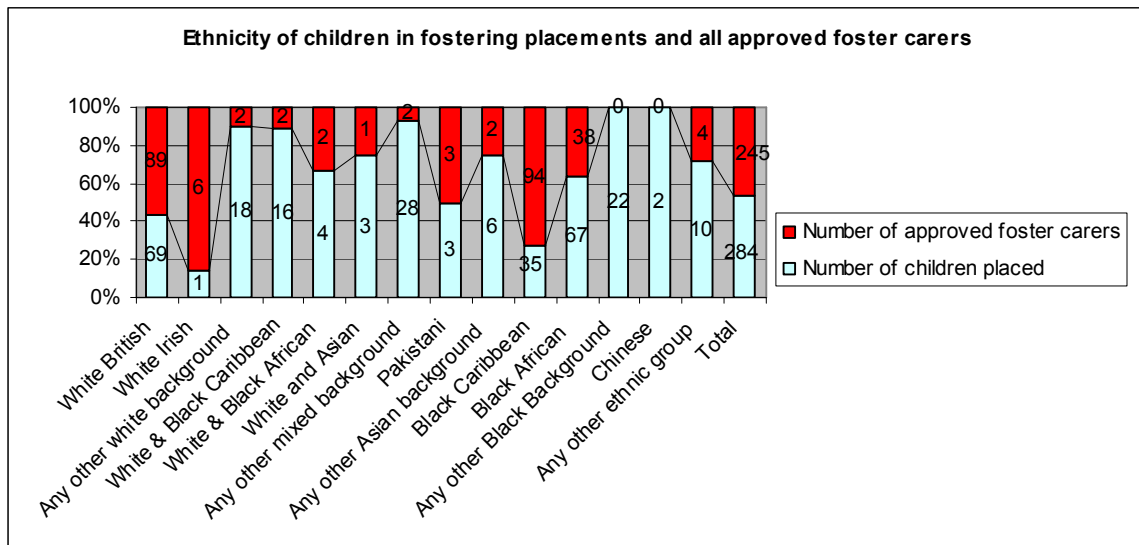
Connected persons carers

12. Connected Persons carers, also known as Family & Friends Carers are usually extended family members, or friends of the family. These carers enable children to remain with people they know and trust if unable to return to their parents. Connected Persons include grandparents, aunts and uncles and older siblings, but can also include people who have a pre-existing established relationship with the child, such as a neighbour or even a teacher. The majority of children do well, but carers continue to need support if children are to achieve good outcomes. These carers are therefore expected to attend foster carer training and receive ongoing support from a Supervising Social Worker. At year end 2013/14 there were 20 Connected Persons carers providing care for 38 children across the age range.

Short breaks care

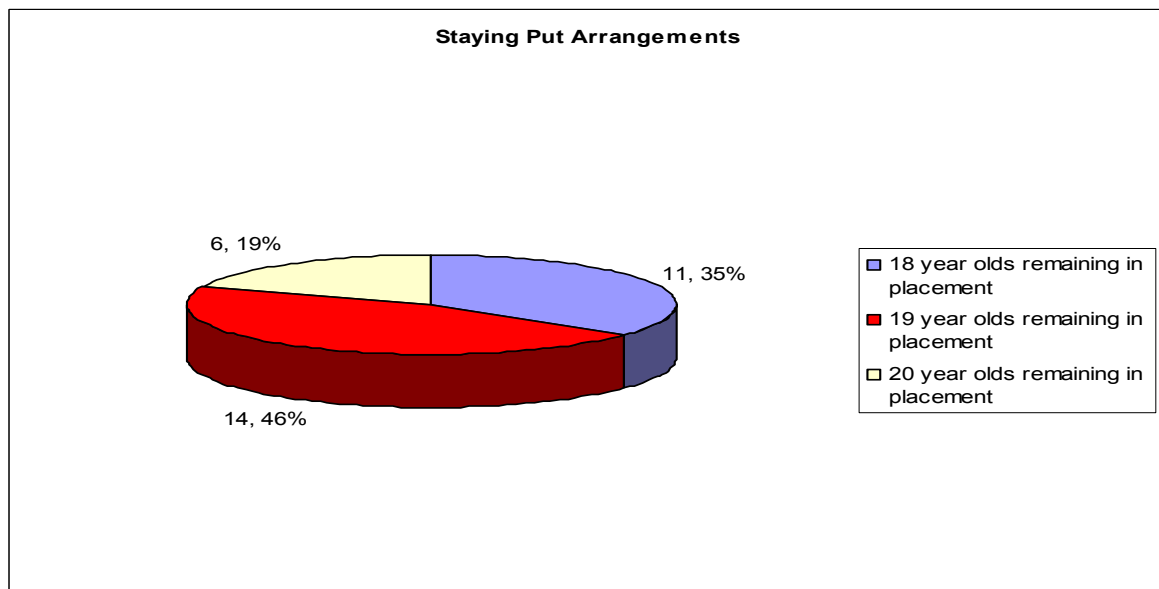
13. The fostering service had 37 short break respite carers offering care to 37 children with disabilities one weekend a month enabling the child's parents to have a break. Short break foster carers are specialist carers assessed and matched to a particular child. These carers generally develop a good relationship with the child's parents and often provide short break care for many years.

Ethnicity of children in fostering placements and approved carers



14. White British (69) black African (67) and black Caribbean (35) represent the highest number of children in foster care. While there appears to be no shortage of white and Caribbean carers there are fewer black African carers, therefore black African children may be placed with black Caribbean carers. All carers are however expected to meet the cultural needs of children placed in their care and receive training and ongoing support to enable them to do so.

“Staying put’ arrangements



15. The Children and Families Act 2014 has introduced a duty on the local authority to provide ‘staying put’ arrangements for fostered young people to continue to live with their former foster carer beyond their 18th birthday and potentially up to the age of 21 years. This is a welcome development for young people who do not have the maturity to move into independent living on their 18th birthday.

16. During 2013/14, 27 young people reached their 18th birthday. Of these 11 remained in placement under 'staying put' arrangements. During the same period 14 young people, aged 19 and 6 aged 20 remained in placement with their foster carers. While it is positive that young people will have the same opportunity to remain with their carers as many other young people living at home, it has resource implications for the fostering service as these households cannot be utilised until the young people move on.

Training programme

17. The Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers has been developed to ensure that all foster carers receive the relevant induction, training, support and continuing professional development (CPD). The standards clearly set out what all foster carers should know, understand and be able to do. They build on existing good practice to help foster carers care for the most vulnerable children.
18. Foster carers can only attend training between a certain period of time and some live outside of the borough. In order to support these carers an on line version of the Standards has been developed to enable carers to complete them from home at a convenient time. To date 130 foster carers have completed their Standards, supported by their supervising social worker, while others are at various stages of completing them.
19. In addition to the TSD Standards, foster carers are able to book themselves onto a variety of training courses specially developed for them to increase their knowledge and experience. Foster carers are expected to complete two new pieces of training each year to support their continued development.

Southwark foster carers association

20. The purpose of the Foster Care Association is to share relevant information and provide support for each other. The Association is very active and recently began producing a newsletter that is published on a monthly basis. This is now emailed to all foster carers. A manager from the service supports the association and attends all meetings to provide updates and respond to queries.

Southwark fostering panel

21. Changes to the Fostering Panel took place in 2013, with the recruitment of a new chair and new panel members. The new panel is now a wider diverse mix of experience and gender balance. The Fostering Panel has various functions, including responsibility for approving foster carers and the numbers and ages of children they are approved to care for.
22. The reformed panel has had a successful year under the guidance of the experienced new chair. A joint induction training session took place during the year that provided the opportunity for departmental members to meet with new independent panel members recruited at the end of 2013. The Panel meet on the last Wednesday of the month and has met on twelve occasions during 2013-2014.
23. The 2011 Guidance and Regulations allow panel members to remain on the panel with no maximum or minimum tenure, enabling those panel members who choose to remain on the panel the opportunity to do so. Fostering Panels do not

have fixed membership, so panel members are drawn from a 'central list' of members for each panel. Panel membership meets the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

Panel business

24. During 2013/14, 26 in house, 5 Connected Persons and 7 Short Break foster carers were approved. During the same period 2 foster carers sadly died, 2 left to register with another agency, a further 5 left to do other things and 7 retired after many years of service. The service terminated 1 foster carer's approval due to safeguarding concerns and 1 foster carer adopted the child they had been caring for.

Fostering recruitment

25. Members will be aware that Southwark engaged NRS recruitment agency under contract in June 2013 to recruit local foster carers. 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. Children were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies carers when it was not possible to place with in house carers, often at greater expense.
26. 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 larger sibling groups and carers who could care for children between the ages of 0-4 and 10-15 year olds. The request was also for carers who could care for sibling groups.
27. NRS has held a number of information sessions in the borough and Skills to Foster 3 day training events for people interested in becoming foster carers. They complete assessments within a 10-12 week period, rather than the 20-32 week period. At the end of 2013/14, the Fostering Panel had approved 14 fostering households to care for 24 children. While this was fewer than anticipated, it was acknowledged that we had not taken into consideration the lead in time to set up the various systems required. The contract has been renewed for a further 12-month period and the search extended beyond Southwark to include surrounding boroughs.

Allowances

28. Members may be aware the existing fees and allowances scheme needed to be reviewed to ensure it met the legal requirements for Connected Persons (Family & Friend) Foster carers. After completing a benchmarking exercise against other local authorities and consulting with foster carers arrangements are now being made to introduce these more competitive rates. The process has been complex and it has taken longer than initially anticipated to finalise, however should be implemented shortly. We believe that the new rates will help attract more applicants to the borough and increase the number of in-house foster carers.

Finance

	Gross Spend
Fostering Allowances	4,921,671
Other Carer support	306,420
Staff Costs	951,202
Total	6,179,293

Average weekly cost per child
Internal foster placement £474.05
External foster placement £850- £900

Community impact statement

29. There are no specific equality implications.

Resource implications

30. The recruitment agency is paid by results, therefore it is anticipated that the substantial savings resulting from Children's placements with in-house foster carers will meet the cost of the contract, however half of the overall cost will be taken from the fostering recruitment budget.
31. 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. It is envisaged that some of 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.

Conclusion

32. This report has set out the functions of the fostering team and outlined its core business and successes over the past year. Our priorities over the coming year are:
- 1) To recruit a number and range of foster carers to meet the diverse placement needs of our looked after children and young people.
 - 2) To continue to provide quality support and training to our foster carers in order to ensure their retention and to enable them to provide quality care and placement stability for the children and young people they look after.
33. We shall continue to work closely in partnership with other services in order to provide a quality service to our foster carers and to improve the life chances of Children placed in their care.

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	21 October 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			21 October 2014