

Fostering

makes an extraordinary difference

2016/17

Annual Report

Southwark Fostering Service



KEY MESSAGES

Southwark Fostering Service continues to provide good quality care for a significant proportion of children and young people in care to the council.

Southwark Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in March 2017 and rated as good overall with a needs improvement sub-judgement for children looked after and achieving permanence. The Ofsted report highlights very important areas of improvement for the Fostering Service which form part of the Fostering Service Improvement Plan for 2017-2018.

In 2016-2017 Southwark Fostering Service published an updated Foster Carers Handbook which is based on the Secure Base Caregiving Model. The updated handbook is an excellent resource and has been positively received by foster carers in Southwark.

PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT

The purpose of the document is to report on the activity of the Fostering Service fulfilling obligations in the Fostering Services Regulations (2011) to review and improve the quality of care, and National Minimum Standards (2011) to report to the executive side of the local authority. It will cover: performance and developments in Southwark's delivery of fostering services; how the council is compliant with key national minimum standards; and the service offered to those seeking to foster and those children in care who are fostered.

This report details the work of Southwark Council Fostering Service from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When a child enters care, it is one of the most important and significant changes in their life and it is critical that the families who look after these most vulnerable children through foster care are the best they can be. As part of its wider agenda to create a fairer future for the most vulnerable children and families, Southwark Council wants every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. For those young children who cannot remain or return safely to their birth families, good quality foster care offers them the best opportunity to experience a warm and loving family environment while the most appropriate plans are made for their future.

The Fostering Service is a service for children in care. It is committed to supporting stable placements for children and young people where foster care is the identified plan. The service is a key element in the council's drive to place more children and young people with Southwark foster carers in or near the borough where possible. It is a fundamental part of our sufficiency strategy to develop enough in-borough placements with the range and capacity to meet the needs of Southwark's children who cannot live at home for whatever reason.

The aim of the Fostering Service is to provide high-quality care for children and young people in safe, secure and nurturing families. The fostering service in 2016- 2017 have fully embedded the Secure Base Caregiving Model. We aim to develop highly skilled foster carers, supported by reflective, challenging and enabling social workers. Our goal is to give children and young people the best possible childhood, to help them become valued members of society and to maximise their life opportunities.

National Fostering Context

While Adoption has had strong Government focus many years there has been less focus and scrutiny on foster care which is where most children looked after live. In October 2016 the Education Committee in Government announced a Fostering Inquiry to take place which would look at:

- The recruitment and retention of foster carers, and the capacity of the fostering system
- Stability of foster care placements, including the impact of the Staying Put initiative since its introduction
- The role of voluntary and independent foster care providers, and their relationships and cooperation with local authorities
- The foster care market, including the costs of commissioning of services, financial incentives in the recruitment of foster carers
- The sufficiency of current recognition, support and recompense given to foster carers
- Foster care for young people with specific or challenging needs, and its relationship with residential care
- The involvement of young people in their care, including their role in decision making
- What the Government should consider in its stock take of foster care

The Inquiry had a call for written evidence up till the 25th November 2016 which Southwark fostering service contributed to. Oral evidence was then given to the committee by a broad range of academics, foster carers and practitioners in February 2017. The subsequent General Election led to a break in the Inquiry and to date the report from the Inquiry has not been published.

In addition to this, in 2016 Edward Timpson the former Children's Minister announced a national fostering stocktake. Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct the stocktake. Its aim was to gain a really good understanding of the current state of foster care in England and how the prospects of children in care might be improved through changes to fostering. They wanted to understand what is working well and why, where improvements are needed to achieve better outcomes for children and identify areas where further research is needed. This renewed Government focus on fostering is likely to lead to increased understanding of what works well and how this can be achieved for more children to enable more children to have placement stability in high quality foster placements.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN SOUTHWARK

Activity Overview - children	31st March 2014	31st March 2015	31st March 2016	31st March 2017
Children in care	550	500	475	498
Children in foster care	424 (77%)	390 (78%)	369 (78%)	381 (77%)
Children with Southwark registered foster carers	242	228	241	231
Children with Independent Fostering Agency carers	144	129	96	109
Children with friends & family foster carers	38	33	32	41

There has been a slight increase in the number of children in care on the 31/03/2017 compared to 31/03/2016 this represents a percentage increase of 5%. The DfE National Statistics for the year ending 31st March 2017 reflect a national increase of 3% in the number of children becoming looked after in England so the increase is close to national trends. This date shows 74% of children in care in England are in foster care. In Southwark this is 77%. This has been consistent over the last 4 years.

The last year has seen a decrease in the percentage use of Southwark’s internal fostering provision based on the data on the 31st March 2017 compared to the 31st March 2016. It is notable, based on this snapshot approach, over the last 3 years usage of IFAs declined by 24% and use of our own foster carers declined 5%. The overall care population declined 10%. Thus in the round our own Fostering Service holds up very well in relation to caring for the great majority of children within the council’s care.

While this data is important, it only gives a snapshot picture of the number of children on a specific date. During 2017/18 we want to be able to report in a way that gives a more accurate picture of use of the internal placement over the 12 month period. At the end of 2016-2017 and into 2017-2018 work has begun to ensure the MOSAIC electronic recording system is able to have a highly effective foster carers register with all key foster carer data. This will enable much more accurate data collection and analysis.

In terms of understanding why on this specific date less children were in Southwark foster placements there are two key factors. Firstly the age profile of children entering care in Southwark has increased with more children aged 10 and over are becoming looked after. Secondly is being part of a sibling group, in particular being part of a sibling group of more than 2 children. This is as carers approved for 3 or more children are limited as many Southwark carers may have an existing child in their family or may not have the physical space for more than two children.

As stated last years annual report, finding placements for teenagers with challenging behaviour, gang affiliation, those at risk of child sexual exploitation and those at risk of or stepping down from residential care is a growing challenge and often have led to the use of external IFA's and residential care. In 2017-2018 the Fostering Service will carefully consider what we can do help give Southwark foster carers the resources and support that they need to meet the needs of more children in this group. In 2017-18 the challenge will be to work with foster carers and with the newly formed Clinical Service to be able to co-design what this clinical and peer support can look like and to also consider bespoke financial packages for foster carers taking very challenging placements in particular as an alternative to or as a step down from residential care for children.

In their report of the 13th June 2017 Ofsted state; *"There is a lack of sufficient placements for adolescents who have challenging behaviours..."* This a key area to develop in 2017- 2018 and over the next five years the challenge is great and will involve partner working with foster carers, health, education, the Clinical Service, the views of young people as represented by Speakerbox and requires an outward looking approach of investigating together with the commissioning service what has worked in other local authorities who are working to meet this challenge.

The use of Friends and Family Foster care has increased with 41 children placed with Friends and Family Foster Carers compared to 31 children in the previous year. This is an increase from around 9% to 11% of the children in foster care and has enabled siblings to continue to be placed together. There is now a lead Advanced Practitioner leading on Friends and Family care in the Fostering Service and a very clear process for assessment and support. There have now been two sets of friends and family carers who have expressed interest as the children they have cared for are growing up in continuing fostering for non related children, and this pathway is a way to increase the capacity of the Fostering Service.

SOUTHWARK FOSTER CARERS

Activity Overview – foster carers	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Foster carers approved	10*	9	14
Foster carers ceased approval	8	4	13
Friends & Family carers approved	7	9	1
Family Link carers approved	5	5	5
Matches for Long Term Foster Care	3	3	4

**Approval was of 8 new full time fostering households, one respite household and one household who had resigned and then later re considered and were reassessed and re approved by the Panel.*

Recruitment of foster carers

Southwark fostering recruitment and assessment was outsourced to an external agency for a two year period from 2013-2015. The in-house recruitment hub became established from May 2015 and in 2015/16. In November 2016 the Fostering Recruitment Manager who had worked in Southwark for a long period retired. An Interim Carer Recruitment Manager was recruited. Recruitment is underway for a permanent Carer Recruitment Manager, and there is also exploration of what has worked in other local authorities to significantly increase the pool of in-house carers. It is recognised that currently while Southwark has a relatively large Fostering Service. On 31/03/2017 there were 203 Fostering Households (including Connected Persons and Family Link Carers) there are not currently enough placements to meet the needs of Southwark children.

In 2016- 17 Southwark Recruitment Hub received 216 enquiries from households about becoming foster carers. For 2017-18 we are tracking monthly how many of these enquiries and subsequent initial visits were from households within the borough. Since April 2016, a recruitment incentive to attract Southwark residents to foster is Council Tax relief to all approved Southwark foster carers. The first quarter of 2017-2018 is showing a significant increase in enquires from Southwark residents and it is anticipated recruitment will be higher in 2017- 2018 with at least 15 households approved, 8 of these within Southwark. All enquirers who live in Southwark are informed about the Council tax offer and this was advertised on the back of all Southwark Council tax bills in 2017-2018.

It is acknowledged that this level of recruitment over the last few years is not providing the number placements needed for Southwark children to provide sufficiency and choice. A key part of the sufficiency strategy going forward will be looking critically at our system and thinking about what we need to do differently to recruit the families that children in Southwark require.

Retention of foster carers

Understanding the retention of foster carers is critical. Fostering Network reported in 2017 that on average a service will lose 10% of carers annually through, retirement, adopting, changing career and de-registration. While our data does not show this level of carers formally ceasing to foster, there is an increasing trend for foster carers to step-down from fostering to staying put placements without formally ceasing their registration as foster carers. This trend masks a higher rate of carers ceasing to foster and we will look at that more closely during 2017/18. It should be emphasised that this is still a very important contribution to supporting a young person on their journey to adulthood.

The Fostering Service responds promptly and efficiently to issues and concerns raised by foster carers. Communication includes newsletters and e-mails and phone calls about community events and opportunities. Fostering supervising social workers visit carers monthly to support carers in their role, assessing the support needed prior to each new placement which contributes to increasing carers' confidence and capabilities in taking children with high needs. There is a monthly support group and coffee morning which takes place in East Dulwich, as well as a group run in Kent where there are a high number of Southwark foster carers. The group run in Southwark has regular attendance from staff in the Fostering Service as well as foster carers. A retired staff member facilitates the group in Kent. The support group often have guests on topics such as Welfare Benefits and on new initiatives for children in care. At the carers request every 3 months there is also a therapist available to offer carers massages to help them relax.

In November 2016 there was a training day with Professor Gillian Schofield and her team reviewing the impact of implementing the Secure Base model in partnership with Southwark. On this day supervising social workers fed back on case examples where they had used this model together with foster carers and the difference this had made to the child and foster family. Two key messages came out of this day. Firstly, for foster carers to be able to provide a secure base for the children that they look after it is critical for them to be provided with a secure base in their relationship with their supervising social worker, with the fostering service supporting them. Secondly, while the Secure Base model was successfully implemented in the Fostering Service, some of the barriers and challenges had occurred as the roll out of the model was not fully implemented with all children's social workers and it was felt that this was really important to happen in a way that directly involved foster carers who were using and had seen the difference the approach made. Events have been planned in 2017/2018 where all social workers in the Care Service will receive training on the Secure Base model. Southwark foster carers who are using this approach will be helped to deliver this.

In April 2015 a new training program for Southwark Foster Carers was launched closely aligned to the payment policy for foster carers with clearer development pathways for them. The program was developed to integrate a systemic and therapeutic approach to retain, support and enable foster carers to look after children who require more than “ordinary” parenting. Much of the training is underpinned by the Secure Base model as a foundation, and the more advanced Empathic Behaviour Management (EBM). The aim of the two approaches empowers foster carers to develop confidence and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care. There have now been 40 carers trained in EBM with 3 courses in 2016-2017 and this involves a 2-3 day training then follow up interactive workshop which takes place over 6 weeks. Follow up support on EBM happens in a support group every 2 months and is regularly attended by up to 15 carers.

Support for foster carers

Despite its rewards, foster care can be a very demanding vocation. Southwark’s Fostering Service recognises this and understands good outcomes for children can only be achieved when foster carers feel valued, supported and equipped to provide the love and care that children who may have experienced neglect, harm and loss require.

Support is a generic term which in a fostering context encompasses the following:

- Allocation and support of a dedicated Supervising Social Worker during the working week and access to dedicated out of hours support 7 days a week.
- Foster carer induction for all newly approved households and as a refresh to existing foster carers.
- A comprehensive post approval training programme that incorporates therapeutic care giving model. The aim of this approach is to help foster carers feel confident and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care.
- A more advanced approach to caring – Empathic Behaviour Management for more challenging behavior.
- Training pathway for foster carers to enhance professional development and quality of placements linked to a clear payment approach.
- Therapeutic intervention and support from a lead clinician, medical advisor, education, and Carelink service to support children in placements and the fostering household.
- Regular carer support groups accessible for all foster caring households.
- Regular communication and information sharing is maintained via emails, quarterly fostering newsletters and coffee mornings.

- Southwark Foster Care Association (SFCA) is an foster Carers group that brings Southwark foster carers together to provide a stronger voice to influence and develop services for Southwark. Carers benefit by having an opportunity to come together and share ideas to develop the service for them and the children in their care. The aim is to enhance foster care involvement by empowering carers to jointly lead social events, recruitment activities and buddy schemes etc.
- An annual foster carers dinner dance is held to thank carers for their commitment to improving the lives of looked after children and young people in Southwark. It is an opportunity for them to enjoy and relax for an adult night out. In 2016 this event was also attended by the Southwark Mayor which was very much valued by the foster carers who attended.
- Recognising and acknowledging the dedication and commitment of Southwark foster carers who make a difference to vulnerable children and young people is evident in the nominations and awards.
- Membership and advice to Fostering Network for all Southwark foster carers which offer independent advice and support with allegations.

Staying Put

The Children and Families Act 2014 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 if they are in education. This is a welcome development for young people who have not developed the maturity to move into independent living and who want to remain as part of a family. The service was well placed to implement these changes as we were already enabling young people to remain in their placements while they completed exams and were prepared fully for independence.

On 31st March 2015 there were 19 young people remaining in Staying Put arrangements, while on 31st March 2016 the number had risen to 40. On the 31st March 2017 there were 46 young people remaining in Staying Put arrangements this is broken down into 35 in provision with their former Southwark foster carer and 11 with former IFA carers. It is positive for young people this number is rising as staying with a former foster carer at 18 is what is best for many young people. This does however present a challenge as it impacts the availability of foster placements for children. It is a key part of offering a secure base to children that they are supported to obtain full family membership, a key aspect of this is being able to remain in a family setting until they are ready for independence.

Short Breaks Care

The Fostering Service had 31 short break respite carer households offering care to 46 children with disabilities one weekend a month allowing 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 parents and often provide care for the children for many years. The short break service is part of the wider support service for families where a child has a disability and enables children to remain within their families and communities while at the same time providing a much needed break for parents.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Fostering Service has a Quality Assurance Framework. This includes: effective fostering panel scrutiny; foster carer feedback including an annual survey; management oversight and review including audit activity; as well as learning from complaints and disruptions.

The audits areas in 2016-17 included: unplanned moves; supervisory visits; placement support and stability; and management oversight. All of the audits led to an analysis of results shared with managers and social workers in the service and the development of an improvement plan. Key messages included the need to place more importance on Placement Planning meetings, and the need for need for Stability Meetings to happen early in placements when there are difficulties, rather than later when issues "set in" and the focus moves towards a potential "disruption". The audits had also picked up the need for an improved recording and performance protocol in the Fostering Service. Electronic records were not consistently up to date with supervisory visits and reviews were not always being signed off in the required timescale. These areas were picked up in the Ofsted inspection during March 2017.

Arising from this, there has been increased management oversight to ensure that updated DBS checks are undertaken well in advance, and this updated information is promptly recorded in Mosaic so all are within timescale. In 2017-18 monthly performance meetings are being introduced with clear standards to ensure visits, unannounced visits, reviews and statutory check are within timescale with reports to senior managers on Mosaic to monitor compliance.

Fostering Panel (From January 2017 this became a joint Adoption and Fostering Panel)

Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (2011) require a Fostering Panel to be constituted, chaired by an independent person. Panel members include representatives from the Children's Social Care and independent members with a range of experience. The panel makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches of children for long term foster care and in certain circumstances reviewing the approval of foster carer. The combined Panel is able to approve Early Permanence carers as both foster carers and adopters under both Adoption and Fostering regulations. Final decisions, based on the panel's recommendations are made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), Director of Children's Social Care.

From January 2017 the Adoption and Fostering Panel combined. The Chair of the Fostering Panel since 2014 took over the role of chairing the Joint Panel which takes place fortnightly.

The rationale for this was to have a single panel with independent scrutiny of approval and matching for both foster carers and adopters. The joining of the panel functions creates administrative efficiencies and some financial savings. The strengths of this new panel approach becoming evident and going forward it will seek to ensure that children, adopters and foster carers have a consistent approach, and this is in regard to ensuring high standard of practice and robust and timely decision making. The overall aim is to deliver an integrated service to children requiring permanence through adoption and fostering, ensuring the care provided is of the highest quality and meets the needs of the children looked after in Southwark. There will be a quarterly review of the function of the joint panel to ensure it maintains a high standard in its service delivery.

Foster Carer feedback

Results from the Foster Carer Survey of Southwark foster carers in November 2016 found:

93% considered the support they receive from their Supervising Social Worker to be good or excellent. In one case a foster carer wrote: *"I don't think there is anything my SSW could do better. She is 100% supportive, always very informative and prompt to return calls. She keeps me updated with training and events, nothing is ever too much trouble for her and I value her enormously."*

76% considered the overall support they receive from the service as good or excellent. This was a 1 % rise from the previous year.

62% considered the support from the child's Social Worker as good or excellent.

Having an annual questionnaire for foster carers is very helpful for the Service but is acknowledged for the last few years the response rate is very low with under 25% of carers returning these questionnaires which in 2016 were online and available as a paper copy. Foster carers are busy meeting the needs of children and often juggling, school runs, fun activities and contact and completing questionnaires either online or on papers seems not be well received. For 2017-18 we are looking at other ways to promote this annual survey to increase return rate as well as focus groups with a lunch where foster carers can meet other carers and give feedback to the Quality Assurance Lead and managers in the service. In addition consideration is being given to whether an online platform such as *Yammer* could be developed securely for foster carers to connect with each and with staff in the Fostering Service.

Complaints

Complaints made against the fostering service are taken very seriously and investigated thoroughly by the complaints team and by fostering managers. The learning from complaints is shared amongst the whole team, and changes are made where appropriate to the practice and processes of the team.

In 2016/17 there were three complaints made by foster carers (or former carers). One carer made several complaints, one of which was upheld. This related to the carer's early experiences as a new foster carer and the lack of important information given to her at the start of a placement by the children's social worker. This overshadowed all subsequent relationships with Southwark staff, and led to difficulties in communication. The lessons learnt were the importance of preparing new carers for the role which lead to improvements in the comprehensive post approval induction programme to ensure new carers have more input at the start of their fostering career. The service is in process of implementing a buddy system of experienced carers with new carers.

The second complaint related to a carer not being given written notification that her approval had been terminated. The complaint was upheld and there is now a process in place whereby carers are formally notified by letter of termination of approval.

The third complaint related to the length of time taken to undertake a fostering assessment. The complaint was upheld, and systems have been reviewed to ensure this does not happen again.

REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR 2016/17

The following is a review and progress update of the development plans set out in the Annual Report in 2015/16:

Quality and stability of placements – Making Placements Better

Develop and implement an Access to Resource Service to offer an integrated and coordinated service to manage resources effectively to make placements better. This will maximise placement choice, strengthen matching and support placements from the outset.

This action was not fully achieved during 2016/2017 although considerable progress was made to set the foundations for this which will begin operation fully from October 2017. The Access to Resources Team (ART) involves the Brokers from Commissioning Service in Tooley Street, moving to Children's Services and merging with the Fostering Placements Team. This will create a one stop shop approach for placements with social work leadership. The foundation work for this has been undertaken during 2016/17. Consultation work has been completed to develop a new Integrated Referral Form which will give a more thorough, balanced and personalised picture of each child looking for a placement to help ensure the best possible opportunity to find the best possible placement. The movement to a single team to consider all referrals for resources and placements will lead to the team developing stronger links with social workers to build profiles and find the best possible placement for each child.

The ART will endeavour to fully utilise the pool of Southwark approved carers. The team will also encompass the Contact Service which will enable the development of how contact workers and other experienced foster carers can be drawn upon to provide additional support to foster carers and enable full use of the in-house resource and improve placement stability. The ART will sit within the Permanence Service and for some children looking for a long term placement the family finding experience and skill of the Adoption Service will also be drawn upon with joint allocation to an adoption social worker to support family finding. In 2017/2018 significant development work will happen in ART to include a review to look at how the Clinical Service can help create packages of support to particularly support carers to care for adolescents with challenging behaviour and those at risk of or stepping down following residential care.

Review and amend the permanence structure to realign the teams within the appropriate function.

In 2016-2017 the Permanence Structure was reviewed this led to a reduction in some roles in Adoption and the creation of a Special Guardianship Assessment Team.

Recruit to vacancies to achieve a competent and motivated permanent fostering workforce.

In 2016/17 the Fostering Service moved to a position of having a permanent social work qualified workforce. There were two agency members of staff who were covering sickness and maternity absence. The Supervising Social Workers in fostering are passionate about supporting foster carers to provide the best possible care for the children they look after. The supervising social workers are all trained in and using the Secure Base model with foster carers. The fostering workforce while supporting foster carers are child centred and when standard of care or allegations occur these are dealt with carefully and sensitively working with the LADO where this is required.

Review and evaluate the Advanced Practitioner role to strengthen and develop leadership and management support in the fostering service.

This was considered as part of the review of the Permanence Service, however the Advanced Practitioner is the key frontline manager role across Children's Service and it was decided the role would continue as part of the key leadership team with the Practice Group Lead and Head of Service role.

Embed the Secure Base framework as the care giving model across the permanence service.

Secure Base is embedded across the Permanence Service and most strongly within the Fostering Service. In 2016/17 workshops on Secure Base took place with both the Adoption Service and Virtual School were well received. In 2017- 2018 we will continue to further embed Secure Base as part of the Practice Framework across Children's Services and Foster Carers will be involved in delivering this.

Permanent Fostering – policy and practice guidance with a scheme for more internal placements

Develop a permanence consultation approach and offer to ensure early permanence planning for fostering or kinship is considered at the earliest opportunity for children and young people.

The Achieving Permanence Practice Group (APPG) in the Adoption Service now ensure that permanence consultations consider all possible permanence options. If the most likely permanence option is fostering then a follow up permanence planning meeting is held with an Advanced Practitioner in the Fostering Service. The approach to permanence for all children is set out at Appendix 1.

Review and streamline the long term fostering process for children whose care plan is permanent fostering. This will include a refresh of the policy and practice guidance to comply with statutory changes.

It was recognized in 2016-2017 that achieving permanence for children whose plan was long term fostering needed to be given much higher priority. A monthly Permanence Panel is now in place to track and challenge quality and permanency planning, focusing on key cohorts such as younger children as it is key for permanence planning to happen as early as possible. This Panel will report to the Permanence Taskforce which is chaired by the Director of Children and Families to ensure the most senior oversight on raising the priority of children in foster care being matched with robust support plans to appropriately matched long term foster placements. This approach is designed and modelled on what has worked effectively in the Adoption Service.

Supportive Lodgings Scheme to be developed to support young people's transition to independence and balance the demand and requirements of "Staying Put" arrangements.

The Supportive Lodging Scheme has not yet been developed during 2016-2017. It is planned that the Permanent Carer Recruitment Manager who is appointed in 2017-2018 will be able to work with partners to develop this scheme. It is hoped that the Catch 22 Southwark Care Leavers innovation partnership can work with the Carer Recruitment manager to design, develop and recruit to a Supported Lodging scheme.

Capacity of Service – to increase the number of active fostering households by 25%

Review and evaluate the effectiveness of the fostering recruitment hub and implement developments for 2016/17.

During 2016-2017 the existing manager retired and an Interim Manager was appointed. The new manager and the advertising with all households in Southwark receiving a Council tax bill has led to increased activity in fostering recruitment which is predicted to be reflected in at least 15 households being approved in 2017- 2018. In 2016-17 recruitments was of 8 new full time fostering households, 1 respite household and 1 set of carers who had resigned but then re-considered and returned to Panel where they were re-approved as foster carers. The impact of the hub has been reviewed and improved working practices and leadership has lead to significantly increased projections of fostering approvals during 2017/18.

Implement the fostering recruitment strategy with a much greater focus on utilising digital and social media.

Digital and Social Media have been used in campaigns in 2016-2017 including Facebook Adverts and paying for higher priority in google searches. Digital newsletters that go to all households in Southwark have included adverts for adoption and fostering in Southwark. The evidence shows while this has some impact the biggest and most powerful recruitment resource which Southwark need to harness more effectively is word of mouth from other foster carers. In 2017-18 part of the renewed approach will be working with and having champion foster carers for recruitment.

Develop a recruitment group that incorporates foster cares and Speaker box representatives to support recruitment activities for 2016/17.

An Interim Carer Recruitment Manager has developed a close working relationship with Speakerbox who support care leavers to facilitate and present at the Skills to Foster training. A renewed recruitment drive is needed for 2017 -2018 and a steering group with Speakerbox representatives, foster carers, the Communication Department, the Carer Recruitment Manager and Head of Service is needed to drive recruitment plans for 2018 -2022 in line with the new Sufficiency Strategy.

Refresh and maintain a foster carer register to ascertain actual vacancies. Carers who have routinely been vacant need to be resolved to either increase their scope to foster or cease approval.

Significant improvement work on MOSAIC started in 2016-2017 to enable the system to hold a Foster Carer Register and effective workflows that allow reports to be drawn from MOSAIC. This work is continuing into 2017-18 and it anticipated would be completed in early 2018. The Service holds a foster carer register currently as a Secure spreadsheet but the aim is for all information and the register to be up to date and on MOSAIC which is essential for the ART team and making placements.

Friends and Family Carers – analyse and review service need to respond to increase in demand and efficiencies.

There is a trend for an increased number of Friends and Family Carers with 41 children placed with friends and family carers as at 31st March 2017. The option of remaining within the family network is positive for many children, for some this will be via a Special Guardianship Order so that the child does not remain Looked After but has a plan of support in the placement. In 2017-2018 the Service has a Fostering Support Team who leads on Friends and Family foster care and the process and has a Special Guardianship Assessment Team. In 2017-2018 the processes for becoming both a Friends and Family Foster Carer and Special Guardian should be reviewed to ensure we are doing our utmost to support children who cannot safely be cared for by their parents to have high quality placements with the right level of support.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017- 2018

We will recruit more foster carers able to meet the needs of Southwark Children and to ensure creative and robust support plans to enable more children to experience family life in foster care.

We will do our best to approve at least 15 fostering households in 2017-2018 and at least 20 households in 2018-2019. To have specific targeted recruitment to particularly meet the needs of complex needs older children, respite placements, crisis intervention, siblings, and parent and child placements.

To review in 2017- 2018 the Fostering Payments Policy and to consider the development of higher paid specialist carers for Adolescents with challenging behaviour and children with extremely high support needs.

We will work with Speaker Box and the Comms team to see how the Siblings Matter to Me campaign could be used to attract potential foster carers and adoptive carers who would like to explore caring for a sibling group as this is a significant area of need for children in Southwark.

We will work with the Head of the Clinical Service and with current foster carers to develop support for placements that could enable foster carers to look after children with higher level needs.

We will build on what the EMB group have started with experienced foster carers becoming Buddy's to newly approved carers, or carers starting their EMB training. The EMB support group have also started a Whats App group to support each other outside of the support groups and this could be built upon for more groups of carers.

We will work with the Care Service to ensure that all children in care have on-going high quality Life Story Work and that they are supported to develop and maintain connections with people who matter to them.

We will promote and champion an ongoing programme of workshops, champions and training for life story work, as part of the Life Story Work *Works* ...campaign including helpful templates, guidance and standards. This will build on the work which we started in 2016 which included regular workshops and training for foster carers. We are one of 7 Local Authorities who are working with the Family Rights Group who received DfE Innovation funding to pilot the **Lifelong links a** with 50 Southwark children over a three year period. The Lifelong Links trial will be aimed at under 16 year olds who have been in care for less than 3 years and for whom there is no plan for them to live within their family or be adopted. The trial will be independently evaluated to determine whether Lifelong Links is effective in improving outcomes for children in care. This funding will enable 50 Southwark children to have a detailed genogram completed and then the Life long links co-ordinator would seek to link with extended family members and key connections in the child's life (which could for example include former foster carers) working with the child and their foster carer to then hold a family group meeting to look at how the extended family may be able to offer ongoing support and relationships with the child. <https://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-group-conferences/lifelong-links>

We will ensure that achieving permanence is as robustly tracked and pursued for all Looked After Children as it is currently for children with a plan of adoption.

We will consolidate and further develop a monthly Permanence Panel to carefully track for each child with a plan of remaining in looked after that this is being proactively pursued in a timescale that is right for the child. For all children to have a permanence plan and support plan and for this to be quality assured and presented to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for a match. To always remain open to other permanence routes for some children looked after to include, rehabilitation, placement with family members, adoption and special guardianship.

We will ensure that the Permanence Taskforce has the information needed to track and have oversight on the number of children matched and timescales for this to be able to monitor and scrutinise that progress is being made. We will also look at how we as Corporate Parents can creatively celebrate children being matched and achieving permanence in foster care.

We will ensure that the Access to Resources Team have the best possible information about children to achieve the best possible placement.

We will develop a new integrated referral form to be implemented in 2017-2018 to ensure the best possible information is captured about every child highlighting their views, challenges, likes and dislikes and personalities. We will develop workshops on creating profiles for children to support finding the right placement for every child. We will develop close working relationships between the Children's teams and Access to Resources Team so that there are face to face meetings and conversations to capture the best possible up to date information for placement referrals.

Exploration of what other ways could be tried to find families for children who on paper referrals foster carers feel they cannot meet the needs of. In adoption Adoption Activity days have been ways in which children have met adopters who may not have otherwise felt able to meet the needs of an older child or a child with their profile. Coram have tried these Activity Days with local authorities and 2017-18 Southwark would like to explore running an event for children and both Southwark Foster Carers and IFA carers for children looking for a long term family some of whom may currently be in residential placements.

We will ensure a robust Fostering Service improvement plan is in place to ensure all statutory checks remain in timescale and that recording on foster carer records is of an excellent standard.

In 2017-18 we will implement a Fostering Service improvement plan to raise the quality of recording on foster carer files and ensure, visits, unannounced visits, reviews and all statutory checks are undertaken within the required timescale and the evidence is on the electronic file.

We will seek to place more children and young people in, or near to, Southwark and ensure for those needing to be more than 20 miles from Southwark there is a Lead Manager tracking that they are not disadvantaged by living away from the borough/

For the Fostering Service to ensure that strategic connections are developed via a Lead Manager for all Southwark approved foster carers living more than 20 miles from Southwark so that children placed with these carers are not disadvantaged by slower access to Services in particular to CAMHS support.