

<b>Contains Confidential or Exempt Information</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Title</b>	Fostering Service Update
<b>Responsible Officer(s)</b>	Carolyn Fair, Director Children and Families
<b>Author(s)</b>	Hannah Foxcroft, Head of Service, Fostering and Connect
<b>Portfolio(s)</b>	Cllr Yvonne Johnson, Schools and Children's Services.
<b>For Consideration By</b>	Corporate Parent Committee
<b>Date to be Considered</b>	10 December 2020
<b>Implementation Date if Not Called In</b>	n/a
<b>Affected Wards</b>	None
<b>Keywords/Index</b>	Fostering Service

**Purpose of Report:**

To provide a summary of the activity the Ealing Fostering Service.

## 1. Recommendations

Members are invited to note this report and identify any additional information they would like to receive.

## 2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered

This report updates members on the activity of the Ealing Fostering Service.

### Introduction

This report is to update Members on the current Fostering recruitment activity and the impact COVID has had on our Fostering Service.

### Fostering Recruitment

The impact of COVID on Fostering recruitment is uncertain. We have continued to see a slow down of recruitment most notably in 2019/20 where we were only able to recruit five fostering households, although five excellent and highly skilled carers who have already proved they are up for the complexity of fostering. The compounding issues of Brexit and financial uncertainty along with the size of property has made London a difficult area in which to recruit carers. The pandemic will bring new and different challenges.

We, understandably, had to put on hold our fostering recruitment strategy at the start of the year and as a result have seen less enquiries to our Fostering Recruitment line during 20/21 with the start of the year being at the start of lockdown. We were unable to do our usual and popular recruitment events at the various festivals and carnivals, and visits to various faith groups were also put on hold.

However as the months have progressed those who have enquired about fostering have appeared to be more determined and serious about undertaking the task of fostering and we are pleased to have seen a significant increase in the number of potential carers have an 'Initial Home Visit' which is the first significant step of the Fostering journey.

The table below, capturing our recruitment data, shows a consistency in the amount of enquires we receive; attendance at information sessions; and approvals we are undertaking year on year. We are on course to approve at least seven fostering households in 20/21 despite the challenges we have faced in hosting our usual recruitment events. We have held all our information sessions via Teams and had 38 attendees during the six events we have held in the year so far. To date we have completed 30 Initial Home visits to prospective carers, 10 sets of carers are awaiting a visit, and 13 set of carers are ready to take the next step in the application process.

Attendance at preparation groups are a key aspect of the recruitment process and this has had to be reconsidered due to the limitations on group work. We have not held any physical prep groups this year. Instead we have commissioned a three hour training package called 'The role of the foster carer', that was tweaked to create a training package that reflected the needs of Ealing children and reflected the diversity of Ealing carers and children. All our prospective foster carers are now required to complete this training which includes an online test and certificate! The feedback from the six carers who have undertaken this training has been positive and it underpins the work that the assessing social worker goes on to undertake as part of the assessment process.

Despite the obvious challenges this year has given us, it feels a positive and hopeful picture for the year ahead.

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Enquiries						224*	266	299	309	243	382	263	376	256	249	254	134
Information Sessions Held						12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	9	6
Information Session Attended						170	89	115	91	91	113	81	86	73	64	45	38
Initial Home Visits						94	72	72	57	49	52	51	60	40	39	25	30
Prep Groups Held						4	3	4	3	2	3	4	3	3	2	2	0
Prep Group Attended						42	26	34	37	16	22	27	21	26	16	12	8
Approvals	17	23	14	12	10	8	8	14	7	10	9	9	10	10	7	5	2

## Current Foster Carers

We currently have 86 Fostering households in Ealing and 18 approved Kinship carers.

Carer Ethnicity	Number	Carer Religion	Number
Black Caribbean	19	Christian	41
Black African - Eritrean	14	Muslim	21
White UK	14	Christian - Roman Catholic	11
Pakistani	8	Christian - Orthodox	5
Black African - Somali	7	Christian - Church of England	2
Black African	3	Bahai	1
Black African - Nigerian	2	Christian/Muslim	1
Brazilian	2	Church Of England	1
White UK/Italian	2	Hindu	1
Asian	1	None	1
Asian British Indian	1	Unknown	1
Black African - Eritrean/Black Caribbean	1	Grand Total	86
Black African - Ethiopian	1		
Black Caribbean/White UK	1		
Chinese/Black African - Ghanaian	1		
Indian	1		
Moroccan	1		
Polish	1		
Swiss	1		
White UK	1		
White UK /White UK & Black Caribbean	1		
White UK /WUK& Asian	1		
White UK/Irish	1		
White UK/White UK & Black Caribbean	1		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>86</b>		

The ethnicity and faith of our Ealing foster carers continues to reflect the cultural and religious background of our young people who come into our care. Recruitment events and word of mouth campaigns mean that we are developing excellent relationships within our local communities.

Most of our Foster carers are local, although we have two sets of carers who started their fostering journey in Ealing and have moved down to the sea in Hampshire but continue to foster for us.

Carer Area	Number
Northolt	21
Greenford	14
Hanwell	10
Southall	9
Acton	7
West Ealing	5
Hayes	5
Harrow	2
Kensington	2
Kenton	2
West Drayton	1
Denham	1
Hampshire	2
Hounslow	1
Pinner	1
Ruislip	1
Wembley	1
Mitcham Junction	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>86</b>

### **Ealing Fostering Recruitment Marketing (Appendix 1)**

With recruitment affected by restrictions due to the Covid 19 pandemic, most fostering recruitment has taken place digitally, with some printed media during this time period. This has included information sessions that take place online virtually on a monthly basis with day and evening sessions on alternate months. These are promoted on social media and on the fostering website.

Other methods of communications have been as normal such as the Freephone, website, Facebook and Twitter (via main Ealing site).

We have produced advertising and taken up other opportunities on offer through Around Ealing magazine, such as free copy for fostering features. We featured a full-page article on Shakuntla Gittins, one of our foster carers, to announce the MBE she was awarded in 2020 New Year's Honours. (**see Appendix 2**).

The Fostering website has been amended to ensure compliance with current Accessibility requirements. We used a specialist agency to test the website for accessibility and following their findings, our webhost amended and updated the website. In addition, we have changed some of the messaging on the website to include how we are working differently due to the pandemic.

The fostering Facebook page is updated regularly, and we boost promotion of Information Sessions on Facebook to reach a wider audience.

## **Ealing's Fostering Facebook Page Statistics**

- 208 Followers

### **Period from 2-29 November 2020:**

- Post reach - 13,038
- Post engagement - 222
- Page likes - 193

### **Current event boost (still live – Information session for 14<sup>th</sup> December):**

- Reach - 6,612
- Post engagement - 95
- Link clicks - 48

A digital marketing campaign commenced 1 October 2020 using 'Google Adwords' with a link to an additional web landing page. The messaging takes account of words and phrases linked to popular fostering searches and includes messages that promote support, training and the localness of the service. The messaging aims to compete with other agencies operating in the area and makes use of our existing film clips of Ealing foster carers speaking. The campaign is running until end March 2021 and is monitored and amended regularly to maximise the effective of the campaign and boost the number of enquires. We have already received a number of enquiries from this campaign.

For the past 12 months we have been working with our colleagues in Brent and Hounslow and St Christopher's Fellowship, as part of a scoping project that looks at the capacity to regionalise or share aspects of our fostering activity. The challenges we face in Ealing in recruiting a sufficient number of skilled foster carers is replicated by our neighbours and we all compete for the same carers. A shared recruitment strategy could reduce costs and net similar if not improved results.

We have all seen an increased demand for foster carers able to take an older cohort of young people. It is incredibly hard to find foster carers anywhere in the country, let alone London, who feel able to take on the challenges of caring for a young person who is at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation, going missing, non-attendance at school and who are also complex to care for. The project, in partnership with St Christopher's Fellowship, looked at developing a shared support package for carers willing to undertake the task of caring for high risk young people. Whilst we were successful in our bid to have DfE funding for the scoping project we have been unsuccessful in our bid to seek funding for the next phase. We are currently in negotiation with the DfE to see if there is any opportunity for some funding and, in parallel, are exploring aspects of the scoping project with our colleagues in the partnership.

## **Foster Carer support**

Ealing foster carers have been a positive and resilient support to our young people and to our service during the Pandemic. Of our 85 fostering households only five were unavailable to foster because of the need to shield and those who were available went over and above our expectations.

Examples include:

*Foster carer putting his work as a cab driver on hold, because of the risk his work may bring to the little boy who has complex medical needs that he and his wife are caring for.*

*Foster carer being contacted by our Emergency Duty Team at the start of the pandemic to visit a family, notably two young children, whose father was sick with COVID. The foster carer was able to speak to the children in their home language and also brought familiar food to them.*

*A newly approved foster carer agreed to care for these two young children, who would be high risk in terms of spreading COVID, when their single father became very unwell and unable to care for his children.*

Aside from individual examples we have had fosters carers volunteering to take extra children so as to keep siblings together and providing support, offering babysitting, travel to and from contact and providing emotional support through various mediums.

The majority of our Looked After children remained at home during the first lockdown, despite having the option to attend school, the young people reported to be happier and more settled at home and relationships between carers improved, but it also meant that our foster carers added teaching to their repertoire of skills and we are hugely appreciative of them. We ensured that all our Looked After Children had access to computers and as part of the Government's scheme and with the assistance of our Virtual school, we delivered over 80 computers around the country in July as part of the provision of laptops to vulnerable children.

During the pandemic we have sadly lost two foster carers, one to cancer, and one carer died of complications of having COVID. We know that lots of our fostering families have lost friends and loved ones all over the world and the travel restrictions have made dealing with grief so much harder.

As part of our support to our carers during the pandemic we extended our existing Foster Power newsletter to become a weekly Foster Power Extra newsletter that was emailed to all our foster carers and included updates from the Fostering service, Training team and advice from our Clinical Psychology team and our Virtual School. Foster carers were invited to share recipes, tips in coping with lockdown and other helpful info. It has been a valued resource and support especially in time of crisis. **(Appendix 3).**

In our November edition we acknowledged the fact that unfortunately our annual Foster Carers' Awards ceremony, which usually takes place in late Autumn each year, could not take place. We are hopeful to be able to hold a celebratory event of some kind in the summer of 2021 as we know how invaluable it is to physically get together.

As is the norm now, we have been holding our regular Foster Carer Support groups via Teams and it is a medium that all our foster carers have adapted well to. We have regular Training events, Reviews and Information sessions all held virtually.

All our Foster carers have been having regular contact with their social workers either via phone, WhatsApp and of course visiting where appropriate. We are very aware that each Fostering family needs varying levels of support and supervision, this often depended on the complexity of placements, experience and of course health conditions. We have been cognisant of the need to keep carers and children safe in regard to visiting our foster carers, and mindful not to traipse a whole host of professionals in and out of their homes. During the summer period visits and meetings were able to be conducted in gardens when they couldn't be done virtually. We have ensured that social workers undertake risk assessments before visiting, ensuring that no one in the household is unwell, and in discussion with the carers, appropriate PPE is worn, including masks, gloves and visors.

We undertook a short survey of our foster carers in the Summer holidays in regard to the support that we provided during lockdown, allowing us to shape our service going forward. It was a mixed response; some found our weekly calls too much, others valued being kept in mind. Some loved the accessibility of online training, others much preferred coming to Perceval House for training, coffee and a chat. We will keep this in mind as we plan for 2021 and ensure a mixed approach to our training offer.

### **Placement Utilisation**

Whilst we have been unable to recruit a significant number of new foster carers, we have very few foster carers leaving Ealing. Those who do, usually do so as a result of retirement.

We continue to utilise our foster placements in the best ways possible and of the 241 young people we had in Foster carer during October 2020, 95 were with Ealing In house foster carers and 35 with kinship carers, as shown overleaf:

Placement Type Breakdown (at snapshot date)	<u>2019/20</u>	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	%
<b>Placement type</b>									
In House fostering (PR1) (U4,5,6), Q2	92	98	94	95	95	95	96	<b>95</b>	31%
Private / Voluntary/third sector provision (PR3 PR4 & PR5) (U4,5,6), Q2	110	110	108	110	112	112	113	<b>111</b>	36%
Placed with relative or friend PR1, (U1,2,3), Q1	46	44	45	37	36	35	36	<b>35</b>	11%
Fostering with Other Local Authority Carer (PR2)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	0%

On November 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 our current In house utilisations figures:

Foster Carer Status – 30/11/20	Number
At Capacity (Short Term Fostering)	44
At Capacity (Long Term Fostering)	15
On hold - Other	13
Vacancy	8
On hold - Illness	5
On Hold - Holiday	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>86</b>

Of the 86 Carers approved, 68% are being used, 22% on hold and 9% available to foster.

### Placement Stability

Despite real concerns that the pandemic would put undue stress on foster placements and we would see our young people having placement breakdowns and unsustainable movements across placements, we have been pleased to see our Looked After Children maintain the increase in placement stability year on year, in spite of the national trend.

By October 2020 we have seen 4.9% of our Looked After Children have 3 or more placement moves, compared to 4.39% in October 19/20 and 7.1% in 18/19 (**Appendix 4**). It is pertinent to note that in September 2020 our placement stability figures were as low as 2.2% and only rose in October due to two siblings groups who were placed in an emergency on a Friday night, moved to new more suitable carers on the Monday and then in both circumstances the new sets of carers experienced an unrelated and unavoidable event that meant both sibling groups needed to be moved to a third placement. The figures in **Appendix 4** show that even during the challenging times of lockdown our carers were able to maintain placements and keep children safe and well.

### **Training Offer to Foster Carers**

This is one of the strongest placement stability indexes in the country and can be directly attributed to the support we provide our foster carers, including a huge and varied training programme (**Appendix 5**) that sees over 30 different training courses on subjects as varied as Suicide awareness and Gaming, to Radicalisation and Food Awareness. Most of these courses are accessible online but as we see changes to the pandemic in the new year, we will review which course can include face to face training.

Our training offer to foster carers is part of the foundation of the Brighter Futures practice model, ensuring a collaborative approach across the professional system. A fundamental aspect of our training package is centred around DDP (Dyadic Developmental Practice), a trauma informed therapeutic intervention for children who are Looked After and their primary carers. Our Foster carers and social workers continue to value the input of our Clinical Psychologists who are all skilled in DDP, who then help formulate the lived experiences of our children, offer consultations with social workers, foster carers, schools and parents and in some cases intervene, providing direct therapeutic work to our carers and our children.

The DDP model, in which all of our LAC children's social workers and fostering social workers have had some training in, includes an 18 week training course for Foster carers, *Nurturing Attachments* and a six week training course for kinship carers and Adopters *Foundations for Attachment*, that is facilitated by our Clinical Psychologists and our trained social workers. To date 95 of our foster carers have undertaken this huge training programme; 17 kinship carers and 15 adopters have completed Foundations for Attachment. The feedback from the training has been positive and we continue to run refresher courses but there is no doubt that this training programme contributes to the stability in our placements.

Ealing foster carers continue to be a highly valued resource and we are delighted that we have seen such remarkable courage and commitment during this very difficult time. We are seeing an improving picture in our Foster carer recruitment and it feels positive for the year ahead.

**3. Key Implications**

Increase in recruitment of Ealing Foster carers.

**4. Financial**

**Financial impact on the budget (mandatory)**

No financial implications.

**5. Legal**

The children Act 1989 sets out the general framework for supporting children in need and their families and the Local Authority duties to looked after children.

**6. Value For Money**

Young people in Care are placed with Ealing Foster carers.

**7. Sustainability Impact Appraisal**

None.

**8. Risk Management**

None.

**9. Community Safety**

None.

**10. Links to the 5 Priorities for the Borough**

**11. Equalities, Human Rights and Community Cohesion**

Equality Impact is consistently reviewed and evaluated in terms of service delivery.

**12. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications**

To be determined.

**13. Property and Assets**

No property implications.

**14. Any other implications**

To be determined.

**15. Consultation**

N/A.

**16. Timetable for Implementation**

**17. Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Around Ealing – Updated General Fostering Advert
- Appendix 2: Fostering – Royal Rewards
- Appendix 3: FOSTERPOWER – Extra – 2 October 2020
- Appendix 4: Stability of Placements of Children Looked After: number of placements. Formerly known as NI 62 (replacing old PAF A1/BvPI 49)
- Appendix 5: Training offer for Ealing Foster Carers and Kinship Carers

**18. Background Information**

**Consultation (Mandatory)**

<b>Name of consultee</b>	<b>Post held</b>	<b>Date sent to consultee</b>	<b>Date response received</b>	<b>Comments appear in paragraph:</b>
<b>Internal</b>				
Cllr Johnson	Portfolio holder Children's	30/11/2020		
Carolyn Fair	Director Children and Families	30/11/2020		
<b>External</b>				

**Report History**

<b>Decision type:</b>	<b>Urgency item?</b>
<b>For Information</b>	<b>No</b>
Report author and contact for queries:	Hannah Foxcroft, Head of Fostering and Connect