

**REPORT FOR: CORPORATE  
PARENTING PANEL**

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**Date of Meeting:** 3 October 2011

**Subject:** **INFORMATION REPORT –  
Annual Report Fostering and  
Adoption**

**Responsible Officer:** Catherine Doran, Corporate Director  
Children's Services

**Exempt:** No

**Enclosures:** None

**Section 1 – Summary**

A summary report on the Adoption and Fostering Service in Harrow.

**FOR INFORMATION**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Introduction**

The Fostering and Adoption service sits within the Placement Service of the Safeguarding Division of Children's Services Department.

The service is responsible for

- Recruitment of foster carers
- Retention, development and supervision of foster carers
- Short breaks placements for children with disabilities
- Procurement of external fostering placements
- Private Fostering
- Permanency Planning for Looked After children
- Harrow/Coram Adoption Partnership
- Intercountry adoption
- Special Guardianship
- Post Adoption support
- Adoption Counselling

This has been a very successful year for the service as noted by two recent Ofsted Inspections.

The Adoption Inspection in November 2010 upgraded the adoption service to good and noted improvements in all areas of work. It particularly commended the excellent outcomes achieved by the Harrow /Coram Adoption partnership and the developments of the support services available for adoptive families, birth parents and adult adoptees.

The Fostering Inspection in January 2011 upgraded the Fostering service to a good and noted significant progress in all areas including recruitment, support and training offered to Harrow foster carers

All of the service areas within Placements Services and the Safeguarding Division are now graded good or outstanding. This is an indication of the significant progress made in these services over the past few years.

### **Fostering Service**

One of the main targets for the Fostering Service has been to increase the number of in-house foster carers so we are less reliant on foster carers from Independent Fostering Agencies.

This is desirable for reasons of cost as in-house foster placements cost on average £350 per week whilst Agency foster placements cost on average £850 per week.

It is also desirable for reasons of quality as we manage the training and development of in-house foster carers and have a direct influence on the quality and standard of care they provide

We also have received Government funding through the Aiming High for disabled children grant (which in 2011/12 has been incorporated in the Early Intervention Grant.) We have used this to develop a Contract carers scheme in which we have recruited carers to provide short breaks for disabled children, allowing disabled children to remain at home and their families to have regular breaks.

We also have a responsibility to consider extended family members when children and young people become looked after. The local authority can approve appropriate family and friends as connected persons foster carers. This allows the children to remain in their families and for them to receive support from the local authority. If children are unable to return to their birth parents we encourage extended family members to consider being their permanent carers. We will hold a Family Group Conference and look for a solution within the birth family .In 2010/11 13 looked after children in Harrow were made subject to Special Guardianship orders by their extended family members.

## **Recruitment**

The following numbers of carers were approved during the past three years

2009/10	2 Short Breaks carers	9 connected persons	9 In-house
2010/11	12 Short Breaks carers	1 connected persons	7 In-house
2011/12	2 Short Breaks carers	1 connected persons	5 In-house

(April to Sept)

We now have 49 in-house foster carers with 57 children placed

We have 15 short breaks cares providing placements to 23 children

The number of children placed with agency foster placements is 21

We have increased the percentage of looked after children placed with in-house foster cares to 40% and decreased the numbers of looked after children placed with agency foster carers to 15%. This has been a significant shift as three years ago there were more children placed in agency foster placements than with in house carers

## **Retention of foster carers**

As well as recruiting new foster carers it is important that we retain and develop our existing foster carers

We have invested in a Full time Training and Development Officer based in the fostering team. A full report on this post and activity was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010. The foster carers continue to

receive a comprehensive programme of training, workshops and learning materials

Each fostering household has its own supervising social worker to offer support and supervision.

Each fostering household has its own annual review setting targets and action plans and reflecting on success and difficulties of the previous year. These annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel which provides independent scrutiny and advice to the fostering service

The Fostering service organises monthly support groups for foster carers, which focus on specific topics and areas of interest.

A monthly newsletter is sent out to all foster carers and has proved to be a useful source of communication and sharing information

Harrow foster carers have their own Foster carer Association – The HFCA – which elects its own committee. The fostering services provide the HFCA with a small grant to run their activities. The HFCA committee meet with the Service Manager Placements on a monthly basis and this has contributed to an improvement in the relationships between the foster carers and the department. This was noted during the Fostering Inspection in January 2011.

An Annual Foster Carer Ceremony has been established and these have been successful evenings celebrating the successes of fostering service. The Mayor and Portfolio holder attend and give awards to individual foster carers. The local press published a positive article regarding the fostering service following this year's event.

A Play Therapist is also attached to the Fostering Team and provides ongoing support to foster carers and the children in their placement.

As a result of the support given to Harrows foster carers no foster carer has resigned due to dissatisfaction with the service. We have had 4 carers resign due to them adopting children, 3 resign due to them moving away from Harrow and 3 resign due to retirement.

We have deregistered one foster carer for reasons of standards of care. The Independent Review Mechanism –an Independent Panel – reviewed this case and Harrow was unanimously supported in the action we took.

### **Teenage Placement Strategy**

A full report on the Teenage Placement Strategy has previously been presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Teenage Placement strategy was established to provide appropriate support, advice and Independent living skills to older teenagers who are looked after so they can move on to independence in a planned and prepared manner. Harrow foster carers are fully engaged in this strategy and sit on a number of the working groups and have prepared a number of young people to move on to semi independence

We have a total of 31 looked after children aged between 16 and 18 in semi-independent placements.

12 with in house foster carers, 7 in Honey Pot Lane and 12 in externally provide semi-independent units.

All of these young people have their own tailored independence skills programmes regarding budgets, health and self-care, relationships, education, training and employment. The young people are all at different stages with these programmes, which are reviewed regularly.

Once 18 they are entitled to housing under the Locata scheme. Ongoing discussions are taking place with Housing to ensure there are an adequate number of places under this scheme.

### **Placement procurement**

The placements of looked after children are a high cost and high risk area. We have set up a team to focus on the management of the procurement of external placements to ensure more efficient costs and better quality.

We have a Senior Practitioner who oversees the procurement of placements and who has ensured robust contracts are in place for all children placed with external providers.

He is also responsible for the negotiation of costs in all placements and has managed to obtain a number of significant savings

The external placements budget has historically been very volatile and always significantly over spent. This year as a result of the increase in in-house placements and the more robust procurement of external placement we are projecting an under spend in this budget; this has been an incredible achievement.

This work is being further developed through the procurement projects being developed through the West London Alliance. Harrow is playing a central role in these which aim to use the power of eight local authorities to drive down costs and raise standards.

### **Adoption**

A full report on Harrows adoption service and the Harrow Coram partnership was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Since then the partnership has gone from strength to strength and attracted positive publicity and attention.

Ofsted carried out a full adoption inspection in November 2010 and Harrow was upgraded to a "good"

Ofsted commented

"The arrangements with Coram are fully embedded and the two agencies work collaboratively; this means that there have been excellent outcomes for children in terms of improved timescales and a good choice of placements"

The percentage of Looked After children who were made subject to adoption and Special Guardianship Orders has continued to be at a high level

2006/7	3%
2007/8	14%
2008/9	20%
2009/10	13%
2010/11	19%
2011/12	8% so far

Tim Loughton, the children's Minister visited Harrow in January 2011 to discuss the partnership and its success has been mentioned in the Governments launch of new adoption guidelines. The Times ran a positive article on the partnership on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Harrow and Coram gave a presentation at the Department for Education on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

Martin Narey the Governments advisor on adoption is visiting Harrow on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011. He is very interested in the work undertaken in Harrow and commented in his well publicised report that "Harrow should be commended for the work it has undertaken with Coram."

The Ofsted inspection in November 2010 also noted Harrows support for adoption families is robust and thorough. " There are written adoption support plans for each family, which are comprehensive, documents that clearly set out the current and likely future needs of the child and adoptive family. There is a formal assessment process for adoption allowances; these allowances are reviewed on an annual basis. There is a clear programme of support and access to a range of specialist advisors"

Ofsted noted " There has been no disruptions of adoptive placements since the last inspection and this is a good indicator that the quality of matching and the quality of support provided to children and adoptive families is good."

Harrow provides a service to those who wish to adopt from overseas. Five assessments were undertaken in 2010/11. All five were from families wishing to adopt from India. The Harrow social worker undertakes a full assessment and provides support and advice to the applicants. The assessment reports are considered by the Adoption Panel. When approved the applicants reports are passed to the DFE and the host countries and the applicants begin their search for an appropriate placement.

The Fostering and Adoption Panels meet monthly and provide regular scrutiny of adoption and fostering practises. The panels have independent and officer members as well as councillor representation. The panels provide annual reports and regular feedback to the department.

### **Section 3 – Further Information**

All relevant information is contained within the report.

## **Section 4 – Financial Implications**

The report is for information so there are no financial implications. It should be noted that the service developments detailed in the report, especially in respect of adoption, the Teenage Placement Strategy and placement procurement have delivered significant efficiencies, addressing long standing budget pressures whilst retaining quality provision for CLA.

## **Section 5 – Equalities Implications**

There are no Equalities Implications.

## **Section 6 – Corporate Priorities**

Please identify which corporate priority the report incorporates and how:

- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Name: Emma Stabler



on behalf of the  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 15 September 2011

## **Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

### **Contact:**

Peter Tolley, Service Manager Placements, Childrens Services  
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**Background Papers:** None