

21 March 2023		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Recruitment of Foster Carers		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None	
Report of: Dan Jones, Strategic Lead - CLA		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Services and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an outline to the Corporate Parenting Committee of the progress in recruitment activity for Foster Carers. There has been a great deal of activity to recruit more households to foster for Thurrock. This has resulted in application and successful approvals.

The need to recruit more foster carers remains, and more applications are required to meet the needs of looked after children in Thurrock. We have bench marked ourselves against our nearest competitors in order to ensure that our offer to foster carers is both attractive and competitive.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Members are updated on the current progress in Fostering Recruitment**
- 1.2 That Members are aware of the key areas for improvements.**
- 1.3 That Members are aware of the challenges the Local Authority is experiencing in recruiting foster carers and what we are doing to address these.**

2. Introduction and Background

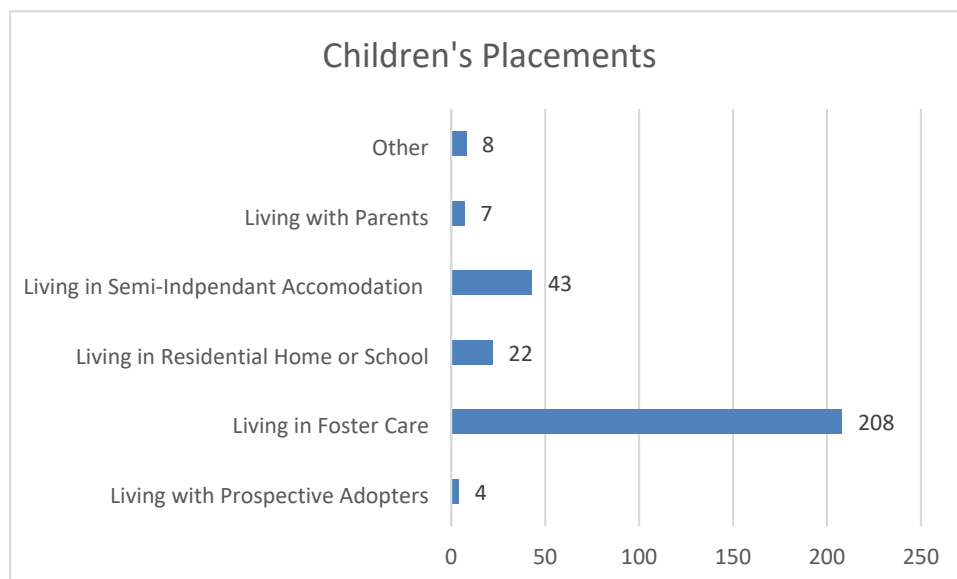
2.1 Sufficiency of Foster Placements

There is a statutory requirement to ensure there is sufficiency of placements for Thurrock Looked After children. The overall context for meeting the sufficiency duty is set out in the statutory guidance:

“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of Children Looked After is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for Children Looked After.”

2.1.1 When a child is unable to live with their birth family there are a range of options that can be considered to meet their needs whilst they are living away from home. This could be to live with foster carers or reside in the care of family friends or family of the child (these carers are known as ‘connected persons’ approved under a fostering approval know as regulation 24); live in a residential home or, for some older children over the age of 16 years they are able to live in supported accommodation. The service is dedicated to ensuring children enter Thurrock’s care only when they need to and that they are looked after in the right placement. Wherever possible this should be within a family setting. Young people should be able to have secure, stable, and settled placements so they can transition into adulthood with the skills to progress to independent living. This report focusses on the approach of Thurrock’s Fostering Service to ensure sufficiency of Thurrock in-house foster carers.

2.1.2 On 31 January 2023, there were 292 children looked after by Thurrock Council. They were placed as follows:



2.1.3 Of the 208 children placed in Foster Care, the breakdown is as follows:

31/01/2023	
Thurrock Approved Carers	
Total number of approved Households	74
Number of children placed with Thurrock Approved Foster Carers	102
Independent and Other Fostering Agencies	
Number of Children Placed	106

2.1.4 The number of children placed with Thurrock approved carers varies throughout the year but it is usual for the range to be between 100-120 children placed with our own foster carers.

2.1.5 Thurrock retains a strong support and financial package to our foster carers. Foster Carers approved by Thurrock, on average, receive a competitive financial package including the Council Tax waiver on top of the weekly allowances. Key recruitment needs are for children aged 13-18 of any gender, for sibling groups of three or more and for parent and child foster carers. Most application to foster are for infants or primary age children or respite carers. These applications are welcome but can leave a gap.

2.1.6 In line with national challenges, Thurrock experiences difficulty in recruiting the volume of foster carers we would like to meet the needs of our children. There continues to be significant recruitment activity in fostering to recruit new foster carers within Thurrock and the surrounding area. A wide range of engagement events has been held in and around Thurrock and our brand is visible in the Thurrock Community. We have made use of a range of advertising including at the end of December and into January 2023, a targeted Google ads campaign was launched to drive enquiries. We continue to encourage residents to make the leap in to fostering.

2.2 The National Picture

2.2.1 Ofsted provide annual statistics on the national picture for fostering¹. It last reported in November 2022. Key points from the report in terms of recruitment are:

- There are fewer foster placements available nationally at 31 March 2022 than there were at the same time in 2018
- Over the last five years there has been fewer households applying to foster even when there is a good level of enquiries
- Nationally 45% of all children fostered are fostered by an independent Fostering Agency

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022>

- Foster Carers are much more likely to foster for a longer career if they are registered with a local authority

2.2.2 In February 2023 the Department for Education set out its response to the National Care Review². Key highlights for fostering are:

- The Government will support a campaign to recruit 3000 more foster carers nationally, this will be piloted in the Northeast in 2023 and to other regions in 2024
- The national minimum allowance (not fees) for foster carers will increase by 12.43% in April 2023 for each area. This will be
- The funding for this uplift is provided through the Local Government Finance Settlement via the existing Social Care Grant in 2023/04, the distribution of which is agreed at a local level
- Support for kinship arrangements are to be reviewed which could lower the demand for foster placements in years to come by preventing children from coming in to care and enabling more children to live with family members as private arrangements. The Government will clarify the detail of how this can be achieved later in 2023

2.3 Recruitment Activity

2021/2022

- Newly Approved Foster Carers = 11 Households
- Applications made that did not result in approval = 17 Households
- Left Fostering = 13

2022 – January 2023

- Newly Approved Foster Carers = 6 Households
- Applications made that did not result in approval = 7 Households
- Left Fostering = 11
- 8 Households applications are being assessed as suitable to foster which should result in 12 placements if fully used. It is anticipated that of these 3 should be presented to panel before 31st March 2023

2.3.1 For both years, households who ceased fostering did so for a range of reasons. The vast majority retired. A small number left for other reasons, such as, their own health, standards of care concerns and due to changes in their family circumstances. No household left Thurrock Fostering to join another fostering agency which is positive.

2.4 Thurrock's Fostering Demographic

2.4.1 Thurrock like most authorities has an ageing fostering population which means that each year we are likely to lose some of our valuable and experienced foster carers to retirement from fostering. The majority of our foster carers are aged 40-65. Our recruitment activity seeks to recruit enough carers to keep our number of fostering households stable and to grow our capacity. Despite significant recruitment activity, this has been challenging to do.

Progress of applications (year to date compared to last year):

	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Total YTD	2021/22
Number of households attending Information Sessions	1	1	3	0	1	1	3	2	4	0	16	39
Number of formal Enquiries ³	14	17	12	11	7	13	13	12	12	16	127	171
Number of IVs completed	6	3	2	6	2	0	3	6	2	3	33	72
Number of Applications Received	2	4	0	0	3	0	0	2	1	1	13	18
Number of applications dropped out	0	0	0	1	4	0	1	0	1	0	7	17
Numbers of approved foster carers (HH)	2	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	6	11
Transfer from IFA to Thurrock	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2

³ Formal enquiries are when a member of the public shares their contact details with us. Where a general conversation is held but the member of public does not share details these are noted as informal enquiries (see appendix 1)

2.5 Advertising Impact:

2.5.1 The following table sets out which adverts have been referred to by applicants when a formal enquiry is made:

Advert	Reports
Thurrock Council Offices/Website/jobsite	50
Facebook/Social media apps	19
Follow up card/Calendar/Xmas card	3
Gazette	5
Google Search/Online	15
Lakeside/Event/Drop-in	26
Lamppost (Grays Bus Station)	0
Leaflet through door (including Council Tax leaflet)	2
Reach/Local iQ (started 22 Dec)	7
Nothing Noted / nothing seen	3
Other Newspaper/Publication (including Thurrock's residential newsletter)	2
Radio (none at present)	1
Referral (& was previous FC & word of mouth, previous enquired)	25
Roadside Adverts	4
School or Church (Banner or newsletter)	10

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 In terms of recruitment of foster carers, Thurrock is able to recruit and support enough foster carers to keep the current number of children placed in-house stable. This, however, is not sufficient for our ambition to increase the numbers of families fostering for Thurrock and making sure children are placed locally.

3.1.2 To improve recruitment the service is reviewing our offer of support to Thurrock Foster Carers to ensure that we are competitive with our nearest competitors and to make sure fostering for Thurrock is attractive.

3.1.3 Following a review of our recruitment approach the plan is to launch a combined fostering recruitment and retention programme to reflect the need to not only recruit more carers but to support and sustain the current cohort. This will especially focus on further equipping those at the start of their fostering journey to have everything they need to do the role. The work will focus on the support offer and addressing any issues carers face beyond the financial element. This will include building a clear sense of being a cohesive fostering community that will not only retain those already fostering with Thurrock but

will form part of the narrative around what you are joining when you foster with Thurrock.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Members to note and consider the options available

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 We consult monthly with our foster carers via a group focussed on recruitment. Their views and ideas are included in our planning.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The increased recruitment of foster carers will assist in the reduction of Independent Fostering Agencies and support the Council with their own cohort of foster carers. An increase in the number of internal foster carers would support the placements budget position.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

Thurrock Council is a registered Fostering Agency and recruits Foster Carers in line with its statement of purpose. The statement of purpose sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering agency and is required to be consistent with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the National Minimum Standards 2011, and the amended regulations.

7.2.1 The Council has a duty under Section 22 G of the Children Act 1989, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure accommodation for looked after children in the Council area, which meets the needs of those children: where this is consistent with those children's welfare.

7.2.2 Section 22C specifies that the provision of a foster placement is one of the ways the Council may provide that accommodation. The placement, so as is reasonably practicable must:

- a) Allow the child to live near his/her home;
- b) Not disrupt the child's education or training;
- c) Enable siblings to live together
- d) Meet a disabled child's particular needs
- e) Is within the Council's area

The successful recruitment of foster carers will assist the Council in meeting these duties

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities

Applications to foster are welcomed from anyone of any background who wishes to apply. They are assessed against the National Minimum Fostering Standards and individual needs, circumstances etc. are addressed in detail.

7.3.1 The Fostering Service is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are also committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council.

7.3.2 The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference and seeks to provide a high-quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families. Increasing the numbers of foster carers provides greater choice of placements for looked after children and improved matching of children with carers. This will support our Thurrock children to fulfil their potential as they have homes providing stability.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

- Impact on Looked After Children

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose
- Payments to Foster Carers Policy
- Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation Children's Social Care Reform 2023
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133537/Children s social care stable homes consultation February 2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133537/Children_s_social_care_stable_homes_consultation_February_2023.pdf))
- Fostering in England 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022>)

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Table of Completed Fostering Recruitment Events

Report Author:

Dan Jones

Strategic Lead Children Looked After

Appendix 1: Table of Completed Fostering Recruitment Events

Over the events listed in the table below, the following enquiries were made by members of the public:

- 110 Informal enquiries (discussed fostering but did not provide contact details)
- 17 Formal Enquiries (where contact details are shared)
- 5 Requests for an Initial Visit
- 400+ leaflets and posters distributed.

Date	Time	Venue
4th April 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
10th April 2022	10:00 to 17:00	Easter Fair / market, Civic Hall
20th April 2022	10am to 5pm	Careers Day at Aveley Hub
21st April 2022	9am - 9pm	Lakeside
22nd April 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
26th April 2022	10am to 2pm	Morrisons, Corringham
10th May 2022	10am to 2pm	Morrisons, Grays
11th May 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
12th May 2022	9am - 9pm	Lakeside
18th May 2022	6pm - 8pm	Orsett Hall, Boardroom
20th May 2022	10am to 2pm	Asda, Tilbury
22nd May 2022	10am to 11.30am	Virtual Online - information event
22nd May 2022	1pm to 4pm	Warren School, Jubilee Event
9th June 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
13th June 2022	9am - 9pm	Lakeside -

21st June 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
8th July 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
25th July 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
29th July 2022	10.30am to 3.30pm	Brentwood Family Fundays Warley Playing Fields - CM13 3AZ
5th August 2022	10.30am to 3.30pm	Brentwood Family Fundays Ingatestone - Seymour Fields CM4 0BE
6th August 2022	10am to 11.30am	Virtual Online - information event
12th August 2022	10.30am to 3.30pm	Brentwood Family Fundays Brentwood Centre - CM15 9NN
17th August 2022	9am - 9pm	Lakeside
19th August 2022	10.30am to 3.30pm	Brentwood Family Fundays Doddinghurst Village Hall CM15 0NJ
25th August 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
26th August 2022	10.30am to 3.30pm	Brentwood Family Fundays Hutton Recreational Ground CM13 1BS
29th August 2022	11am to 3pm	East Street Park, Grays (via Gumley Road)

3rd September 2022	10am to 6pm	Basildon Pride
6th September 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
7th September 2022	10am to 2pm	Sainsbury's Chafford Hundred
8th September 2022	10 to 11:30am	Lightship Café, Grays Beach Park FC Recruitment meeting
16/09/2022	1pm to 2.30pm	Tilbury Mosque
21st September 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
23rd September 2022	12 to 2pm	Grays Mosque
25th September 2022	11.15am to 1.30pm	Grays Gurdwara
3rd October 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
10th October 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
18th October 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
2nd November 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
13th November 2022	10am to 4pm	Civic Hall Christmas Market -
16th November 2022	10am to 11.30am	Interfaith community event
16th November 2022	12noon to 7pm	Orsett Hall Christmas Market
18th November 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
1st December 2022	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event

4th December 2022	10am to 3pm	Grays Beach Park Christmas Market (outside)
19th December 2022	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
10th January 2023	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
13th January 2023	10 - 2pm	Asda, Tilbury
16th January 2023	9am to 9pm	Lakeside drop in (TBC)
25th January 2023	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
1st February 2023	12pm to 3pm	John Lewis - Partners (staff) - stall in their dining area
7th February 2023	9am to 9pm	Lakeside drop in
9th February 2023	9am to 2pm	Impulse, Blackshots
10th February 2023	10am to 12 noon	Virtual Online - information event
15th February 2023	9am to 2pm	Impulse, Belhus
16th February 2023	10am to 2pm	Sainsbury's Chafford
22nd February 2023	3pm - 7pm	Impulse, Blackshots
23rd February 2023	6pm to 8pm	Virtual Online - information event
25th February 2023	10am to 3pm	Drop In - Store - John Lewis - Bluewater
27th February 2023	3pm - 7pm	Impulse, Belhus