

London Borough of Bromley

PART 1 - PUBLIC

Briefing for Children and Young People Portfolio Holder 24 January 2012

FOSTER CARERS RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

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1. Summary

- 1.1 At the meeting of the CYP PDS Committee on the 6 September 2011 a report was presented by officers regarding the outcomes from the five day Ofsted inspection of Bromley's Fostering Service, undertaken between the 31 May and 6 June 2011, together with the fostering service development plan which detailed the approach being taken to bring about service improvements and increase the number of foster carers.
- 1.2 As part of the Committee's consideration, the Chairman asked for a further briefing in relation to the recruitment and support for foster carers.
- 1.3 This information report highlights the recruitment activity from April 2011 and plans for further targeted recruitment.

2. **RECRUITMENT**

- 2.1 The CYP department embarked on a comprehensive recruitment drive to attract foster carers which coincided with the national 'Fostering Fortnight' campaign in May 2011. Working with the Council's Communication Team adverts were placed in the local press and at various static advertisement positions throughout the Borough.
- 2.2 Since April we have received 94 enquiries from people that wish to find out more about fostering. To date, from the 94, 61 have been subject to an initial screening visit by members of the fostering team from which 31 are now allocated for a full Form F (formal) assessment. There are a further 14 initial applications in the pipeline to be processed, which if successful following the initial screening stage will mean that by the end of January we will be assessing c45 new fostering households.
- 2.3 On average Form F assessments take between 4 – 6 months to complete. It is anticipated that the majority of current assessments (31), should they be successful, will be presented for approval to the Fostering Panel prior to April 2012.

- 2.4 In addition to the current assessment activity, 10 new fostering households have been presented and approved by the fostering panel since April 2011. However, during the same time period 9 fostering households have been de-registered. Foster carers cease fostering for a number of reasons; retirement, change in personal circumstances and very occasionally they are de-registered because of their suitability to remain as carers. The number of foster carers that cease to foster does fluctuate annually and this needs to be factored into future recruitment campaigns.
- 2.5 Although in the main, the applications have been from households who wish to foster non-disabled children, we have received a small number of applications from families who are interested in providing short break care to disabled children.

3. FUTURE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGNS

- 3.1 Although our recruitment activity during this calendar year has been generic it is acknowledged that we need a more targeted approach to attract foster carers for adolescents and disabled children.
- 3.2 We have developed our future recruitment strategy to focus on adolescents and disabled children. It is our plan to specifically recruit for disabled children in February 2012 using local press. We also plan to repeat this targeted recruitment during the second week of 'fostering fortnight' in May 2012. In addition, we are planning to focus upon adolescent carer recruitment during the first week of 'fostering fortnight'. Each recruitment campaign will be supported by specific publicity material aimed at our target audience.
- 3.3 'Invest to save' proposals are currently being considered to ensure that we are able to expedite assessments as the current assessment activity has left very limited capacity to take on new work.
- 3.4 In addition we are developing more comprehensive support packages to enable challenging young people and those with complex needs to be better supported within our foster placements.

4. HOUSING AND ADAPTATIONS

- 4.1 One of the issues raised at the meeting of the CYP PDS was in relation to housing and adaptations and whether this presents a barrier to foster carers for disabled children.
- 4.2 This is a complex area, particularly in relation to the provision of short break foster care. Where children and young people are placed full time with foster carers their needs are assessed by an occupational therapist and aids and adaptations can be provided in collaboration with Bromley Health Care. Such daily aids to living may include specialist equipment, lifts, hoists etc. Where such equipment is installed the fostering service accepts responsibility for the servicing and maintenance.
- 4.3 Likewise, where a disabled child or young person is placed full time with a foster carer and major adaptations are required to the property, such as the provision of wet rooms, bedroom extensions, these can be supported through the disabled facilities grant.

- 4.4 Provision of static equipment, such as hoists, lifts etc and adaptations to property for those carers who provide short break services can be more problematic. It is often the case that such equipment has already been provided in the child's normal residence, whether that be within the birth families home or permanent foster placements and therefore the health authority (who are responsible for the provision of such equipment) have discharged their duty. Such equipment is often expensive to purchase, install and maintain and the local authority would need to identify a funding stream to support this.
- 4.5 It is important to note, that where adaptations to a foster carers property has been made by utilising monies from the disabled facilities grant which is considered to increase the market value of the property, a charge is often levied against the work undertaken. For foster carers who own their property this may present a barrier to having this work undertaken.

5. HOUSING BENEFIT

- 5.1 The Welfare Reform Bill proposes to reduce housing benefit for under-occupied social housing. Bedrooms used by fostered children will be classed as 'under-occupied' under the new proposals, because fostered children are not included in the assessment of housing need. Representation has been made to Government by the Fostering Network and British Association of Adoption and Fostering as this measure may undermine attempts to recruit carers who claim housing benefit.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 There has been good progress in the recruitment of London Borough of Bromley foster carers during 2011 and there is a clear plan for proactive recruitment during 2012 which will need to be sustained into 2013.
- 6.2 The Fostering Service Development Plan and Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy is monitored by the Elected Members Executive Working Group: Children's Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting.