

Corporate Parenting Panel Agenda



To: Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair)

Councillors Shafi Khan, Bernadette Khan, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Maria Gatland and Helen Redfern

Co-optee Members

Virtual School: Shelley Davies, Angela Griffiths, Sarah Bailey

CLA Designated Health Professionals: Dr Julia Simpson, Fiona Simmons

Health Commissioners: Pasquale Brammer, Roneeta Campbell-Butler

Health Providers: Sue Goode

EMPIRE: Young People and Council Staff

Care Leaver Representative; Ashleigh Searle

Foster Carer Representatives: Angela Christmas, Manny Kwamin

A meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** which you are hereby summoned to attend, will be held on **Wednesday, 28 April 2021** at **5.00 pm**. This meeting will be held virtually and a meeting link will be circulated in due course.

JACQUELINE HARRIS BAKER
Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
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Bernard Weatherill House
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www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings
Tuesday, 20 April 2021

The agenda papers for all Council meetings are available on the Council website
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If you require any assistance, please contact Michelle Ossei-Gerning
020 8726 6000 x84246 as detailed above

AGENDA – PART A

1. Apologies for absence

To receive any apologies for absence from any members of the Panel.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

(To follow)

3. Disclosures of interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and the statutory provisions of the Localism Act, Members and co-opted Members of the Council are reminded that it is a requirement to register disclosable pecuniary interests (DPs) and gifts and hospitality to the value of which exceeds £50 or multiple gifts and/or instances of hospitality with a cumulative value of £50 or more when received from a single donor within a rolling twelve month period. In addition, Members and co-opted Members are reminded that unless their disclosable pecuniary interest is registered on the register of interests or is the subject of a pending notification to the Monitoring Officer, they are required to disclose those disclosable pecuniary interests at the meeting. This should be done by completing the Disclosure of Interest form and handing it to the Democratic Services representative at the start of the meeting. The Chair will then invite Members to make their disclosure orally at the commencement of Agenda item 3. Completed disclosure forms will be provided to the Monitoring Officer for inclusion on the Register of Members' Interests.

4. Urgent Business (if any)

To receive notice of any business not on the agenda which in the opinion of the Chair, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

5. Update on actions agreed at previous meeting(s)

6. Children in Care Performance Scorecard (Pages 5 - 6)

7. Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel (Pages 7 - 18)

8. Fostering Statement of Purpose (Pages 19 - 34)

9. Croydon Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy (Pages 35 - 46)

10. Review of Fostering Services & Escalation Policy for Foster Carers (Pages 47 - 50)

11. How has the Panel helped Children in Care today?

For the panel to consider how its work at the meeting will improve services for children in care.

12. Work Programme (Pages 51 - 52)

To consider and approve the Panel's work programme for the municipal year 2020/21.

13. Exclusion of the Press and Public

The following motion is to be moved and seconded where it is proposed to exclude the press and public from the remainder of a meeting:

"That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within those paragraphs indicated in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended."

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Indicator Number	Indicator Title	Polarity	2019/20															2020/21			Comparative Data							
			Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	RO	2020-21 Target	RAG	RAG-Based on (YTD/LATES)	2020-21 YTD or latest	DfE Published Croydon 2019-20	Stats Nbr Average 2019-2020	London 2019-20	England 2019-20	
CLA 1	Number of CLA at the end of the month		831	803	807	807	787	788	777	767	765	764	747	741	730	699	697	691	RC	NA	Grey	NA	691	791	509	10,010	80,080	
CLA 2	Rate of CLA per 10,000 under 18 population		87.5	84.6	85.0	85.0	82.9	83.2	82.0	80.8	80.6	80.5	78.7	78.1	76.9	73.6	73.4	72.8	RC	NA	Grey	NA	73	83.0	52.8	49.0	67.0	
CLA 2a	Rate of CLA per 10,000 under 18 population excluding UASC		57.0	54.5	55.3	55.6	54.6	55.0	54.6	53.8	53.7	54.2	52.9	53.2	52.9	51.1	51.2	50.7	RC	NA	Grey	NA	51	55.6				
CLA 3	Number of CLA at the end of the month who are Local CLA (Non-UASC)		541	517	525	528	518	521	517	511	510	515	502	505	502	485	486	481	RC	NA	Grey	NA	481	528				
CLA 3b	Number of Ceased CLA in the month who are Local CLA (Non-UASC)		6	16	20	11	24	9	14	21	13	21	13	17	19	18	10	12	RC	NA	Grey	NA	191	172				
CLA 4	Number of CLA at the end of the month who are UASC		290	286	282	279	269	267	260	256	255	249	245	236	228	214	211	210	RC	NA	Grey	NA	210	279	270	53	5000	
CLA 4b	Number of Ceased CLA in the month who are UASC		10	30	10	9	9	5	9	5	7	9	11	7	14	22	7	7	RC	NA	Grey	NA	112	127				
CLA 5	Number of new CLA in month (total)		16	33	22	21	22	7	22	17	20	15	12	19	19	18	11	13	RC	NA	Grey	NA	195	357	219	5160	30970	
CLA 6	Number of new CLA in month who are UASC		11	24	7	7	2	3	3	4	6	3	3	4	8	4	4	6	RC	NA	Grey	NA	50	152				
CLA 10	Percentage of CLA for whom a visit has taken place within statutory timescales (6 weekly Visits)	BIB	96%	96%	94%	89%	96%	93%	93%	88%	98%	93%	94%	94%	94%	95%	96%	95%	RC	95%	Green	LATEST	95%	94%				
CLA 11	Percentage of CLA children with an up to date review	BIB	93%	93%	92%	95%	94%	95%	96%	97%	96%	95%	95%	96%	97%	97%	96%	95%	AFS	95%	Green	YTD	96%	92%				
CLA 12	Percentage of CLA who have participated in Reviews (aged 4+) in the month	BIB	69%	68%	78%	71%	76%	68%	80%	73%	77%	68%	73%	77%	77%	82%	73%	83%	AFS	80%	Amber	YTD	76%	73%				
CLA 13	CLA 13 - Percentage of CLA at SSA (Statutory School Age) with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviewed & completed in the last 6 months.	BIB	95%	90%	87%	88%	83%	85%	89%	95%	95%	94%	92%	89%	96%	97%	97%	93%	RC	85%	Green	LATEST	93%	87%				
CLA 14	Percentage of eligible CLA with an up-to-date Care Plan (6 months)	BIB	94%	94%	93%	87%	82%	79%	76%	86%	89%	91%	92%	91%	83%	74%	75%	85%	RC	95%	Amber	LATEST	85%	87%				
CLA 15	Percentage of eligible CLA with an up-to-date Pathway Plan	BIB	77%	80%	88%	86%	83%	81%	81%	72%	74%	74%	78%	85%	76%	70%	70%	82%	RC	95%	Red	LATEST	82%	86%				
CLA 16	% of children in care for at least 12 months for whom health assessments are up to date.	BIB	82%	82%	79%	80%	82%	80%	83%	86%	88%	87%	85%	86%	89%	93%	92%	90%	RC	95%	Amber	LATEST	90%	84%	93%	92%	90%	
New	Number of children in care for at least 12 months for whom health assessments were due in the month (RHA's completed in the year)												42/128	47/124	20/81	17/41	28/44	27/57	RC	NA	Grey	NA	TBC					
CLA 17	% initial health assessments requested for health service within 3 working days of date child become looked after.	BIB	65%	52%	42%	36%	11%	33%	63%	42%	63%	50%	45%	50%	50%	65%	70%	TBC	RC	NA	Grey	NA	49%	49%				
CLA 18	% initial health assessments delivered within 20 working days of date child became looked after.	BIB	60%	70%	33%	47%	56%	67%	89%	50%	65%	67%	70%	71%	75%	93%	60%	TBC	RC	95%	Grey	NA	69%	67%				
CLA 19	Percentage of CLA that have been in care for 12+ months, that have had same social worker for last 6 months	BIB	61%	61%	62%	59%	69%	71%	72%	68%	71%	72%	68%	62%	67%	71%	66%	72%	RC	65%	Green	LATEST	72%	59%				
CLA 20	Percentage of CLA under 16 in care for more than 2.5 years: in the same placement for 2+ years	BIB	79%	79%	78%	77%	70%	70%	66%	73%	74%	72%	72%	69%	69%	73%	77%	70%	RC	75%	Amber	LATEST	70%	77%				
CLA 21	Percentage of CLA at end of month with 3 or more placements during the year	SIB	7%	8%	8%	8%	7%	6%	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%	RC	8%	Green	LATEST	5%	8%				
CLA 22	Percentage of CLA placed <20 miles from home	BIB	83%	83%	84%	84%	84%	83%	84%	84%	84%	84%	83%	83%	82%	83%	84%	83%	85%	RC	90%	Amber	LATEST	85%	84%			
CLA 23	Number of CLA allocated to CWD		34	34	30	28	28	29	29	29	28	26	26	28	26	24	23	23	MB	NA	Grey	NA	23	28				
CLA 24	Percentage of CLA for whom a visit has taken place within statutory timescales (Allocated to CWD teams)	BIB	97%	94%	77%	96%	96%	100%	100%	100%	100%	88%	96%	94%	92%	100%	100%	100%	MB	95%	Green	LATEST	100%	96%				
CLA 25	Number of CLA who returned home (E4A, E4B, E13, E41)	BIB	2	5	7	5	14	2	7	9	3	7	8	5	10	9	6	2	RC	NA	Grey	NA	82	72	74	1,550	8,440	
Fostering																												
F 1	Total number of foster carer households	BIB	228	231	229	230	234	235	240	238	235	238	236	229	227	223	222	222	RC	NA	Grey	NA	222	240	106	3,365	42,125	
F 2	Percentage of DBS Checks within time	BIB	97%	98%	99%	98%	96%	96%	96%	97%	97%	96%	95%	97%	97%	97%	98%	98%	RC	95%	Green	LATEST	98%					
F 3	Percentage of Annual Reviews of Foster Carers completed on time	BIB	87%	94%	95%	95%	97%	98%	98%	98%	95%	95%	98%	96%	96%	97%	98%	95%	RC	95%	Green	LATEST	95%					
F 4	Percentage of Foster Carers' most recent announced visit within timescales	BIB	79%	91%	86%	79%	92%	96%	94%	95%	92%	96%	95%	84%	84%	83%	85%	88%	RC	95%	Amber	LATEST	88%					

Indicator Number	Indicator Title	Polarity	2019/20						2020/21						RO	2020-21 Target	RAG	RAG- Based on (YTD/LATES)	2020-21 YTD or latest	Comparative Data							
			Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20						Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	DfE Published Croydon 2019-20	Stats Nbr Average 2019-2020	London 2019-20	England 2019-20
Adoption																											
AD 0	Number of Adoption Orders achieved in the month	BIB	4	1	0	2	3	1	1	4	0	4	1	0	2	1	0	2	IF	NA	Grey	NA	17				
AD 1	Number of children for whom the agreed plan is adoption (ADM)	BiB	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	IF	NA	Grey	NA	2				
AD 2	Number of children waiting to be matched to an adopter		12	15	19	17	24	24	24	20	16	13	16	14	12	13	13	11	IF	NA	Grey	NA	11				
AD 3	Number of children placed in the month	BiB	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	1	3	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	IF	NA	Grey	NA	12				
AD 7	Average time between a child entering care and moving in with the adoptive family , for children who have been adopted (days) (12 Months rolling average)	SIB	504	477	531	550	548	548	553	553	538	562	548	555	501	504	504	527	IF	558	Green	YTD	527				
AD 8	Average time between the LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days) (12 months rolling average)	SIB	224	191	233	242	263	263	265	253	249	262	274	277	214	208	224	223.4	IF	226	Green	YTD	223				
AD 9	Number of special guardianship orders made in the month (from care)	BIB	6	4	6	2	1	1	0	2	2	1	3	1	1	1	0		IF	NA	Grey	NA	13				
Care Leavers																											
CL a	Care Leavers with an Up-to-date Pathway plan	BIB	79%	82%	82%	79%	83%	91%	91%	77%	83%	84%	78%	78%	75%	78%	75%	83%	MM	85%	Amber	LATEST	83%				
CL 1	Number of Care Leavers in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 17th to 21st Birthday		372	376	394	388	377	384	367	358	347	405	347	339	335	336	339	3352	MM	NA	Grey	NA	3352				
CL 1a	Percentage in employment, education, or training (EET) on their 17th to 21st Birthday	BIB	64%	65%	64%	64%	63%	63%	61%	60%	58%	62%	59%	57%	58%	58%	58%	57%	MM	85%	Red	LATEST	57%				
CL 2	Number of Care Leavers not in employment, education, or training (NEET) on their 17th to 21st Birthday	SIB	211	205	218	217	220	224	236	236	242	245	244	260	246	242	241	267	MM	NA	Grey	NA	267				
CL 2a	Percentage not in employment, education, or training (NEET) on their 17th to 21st Birthday	SIB	36%	35%	36%	36%	37%	37%	39%	40%	42%	38%	41%	43%	42%	42%	42%	43%	MM	NA	Grey	NA	43%				
CL 3	Number of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation on their 17th to 21st Birthday		549	557	594	586	576	585	581	572	573	573	565	577	560	557	553	597	MM	NA	Grey	NA	597				
CL 3a	Percentage in suitable accommodation on their 17th to 21st Birthday	BIB	94%	95%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%	96%	MM	90%	Green	LATEST	96%				
CL 4	Number not in suitable accommodation on their 17th to 21st birthday	SIB	37	27	23	23	26	25	25	24	21	23	26	24	21	21	27	27	MM	NA	Grey	NA	27				
CL 5	Percentage in touch with the authority from 17th to 21st birthday	BIB	94%	92%	96%	95%	94%	92%	91%	89%	89%	91%	91%	93%	92%	89%	90%	97%	MM	95%	Green	LATEST	97%				
CL 6	Care Leavers - LOCAL (non-UASC)						335	337	333	334	352	348	344	346	336	339	340	339	MM	NA	Grey	NA					
CL 7	Care Leavers - UASC (non-LOCAL)						513	523	526	528	495	459	444	434	429	444	447	447	MM	NA	Grey	NA					

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel
SUBJECT:	Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel
LEAD OFFICER:	Roisin Madden Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	

SUMMARY OF REPORT:
POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON: Include here a brief statement on how the recommendations address one or more of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities: Corporate Plan for Croydon 2018-2022

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of high quality, safe and aspirational foster placements that meet the needs of our children looked after.
- 1.2 Children's Services has been successful this year in placing a significant number of children with in-house foster carers and an increased number of children have been placed with connected families. The overall number of foster carers has not increased this year but this is part of a recruitment drive that has now begun. The service is a stable one with few staff changes and we have more children remaining with their foster carers at age 18 on Staying Put arrangements. Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a priority particularly for older children, sibling groups, children with disabilities and long-term placements.
- 1.3 From 1 November 2020 fostering recruitment was brought back in house and we are hopeful that we will be able to target foster carers from our BAME and other communities to ensure successful and appropriate matching. We are revising how we work with foster carers, with more intensive support for the first six months of their first child being placed, continued use of experienced foster carers for mentoring and promoting the CFCA.
- 1.4 This report complies with Standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards with the Fostering Service Manager monitoring and reporting to corporate parenting members about the management and outcomes of the service.

2. Role of the Fostering Service

2.1 The Fostering Service is responsible for:

- I. Support, supervision and training of foster carers, including family and friend carers (connected carers)
- II. Ensuring provision of local safe and supportive foster placements in accordance with fostering national minimum standards
- III. Promoting placement stability and permanence planning for our children
- IV. Recruitment and assessment of new foster carers
- V. Private Fostering

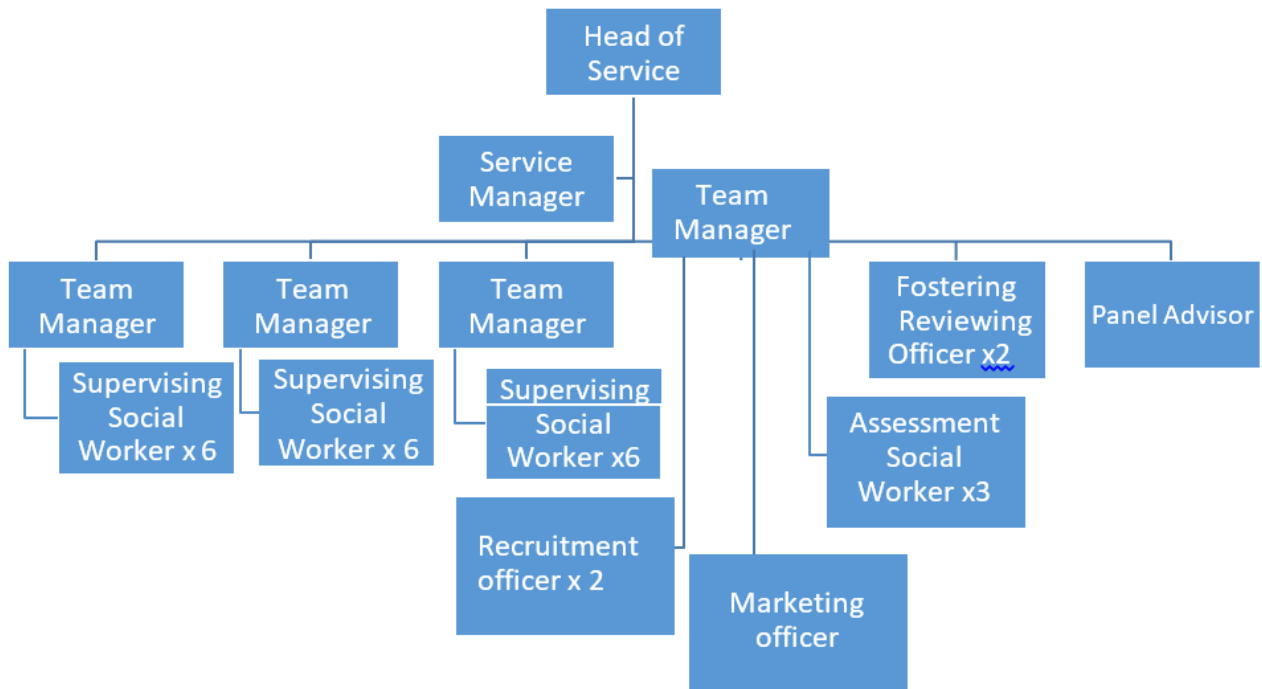
2.2 The priorities are to ensure that:

- I. All children who come into care have an experience of safe, secure and consistent care
- II. All children experience a safe place within which they can play, grow, thrive and are supported to reach their full potential
- III. The holistic needs of any child are addressed and supported through health, education and social development enhancing opportunity to develop resilience and achieve.
- IV. Support for early permanence for children in care and to ensure that children who cannot safely remain at home are offered a permanent family base without delay

2.3 We have a varied range of foster carers with different skills and experience who provide placements including respite; transition to permanence through adoption and long term fostering. We also assess and support family and friends who want to look after children in their extended family or social network, these are called connected carers. All foster carers are supervised and supported by supervising social workers from the fostering teams and provided with training opportunities.

3. Service Structure

3.1 Croydon's Fostering Service is managed under the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. There is a Service Manager with responsibility for this service. Most of the staff within this service are permanently employed.



3.2 The supervising social workers assess, supervise and support foster carers, ensuring that they meet fostering standards, have an annual review and monitor quality of care, training and development of carers. The most significant aspect of their work is to ensure that children remain safe in foster care and that carers feel supported to fulfil their responsibilities. The two fostering reviewing officers are responsible for overseeing annual reviews of all our foster carers and making recommendations about terms of approval. Croydon has a part time fostering panel advisor who is a point of reference in relation to the fostering panel's policies, procedures and expectations; ensuring that panels undertake reviews of carers as required and follow regulations.

4. Supervision and Support to Foster Carers

4.1 We have 222 fostering households. Croydon looks after 691 children who are placed in a variety of placements in accordance with their care plan.

Tab 1a. Current LAC by Placement Type and Status	Local	UASC	Total
A6 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	9		9
H5 - Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's Homes Regulations	36	9	45
K2 - Children's Homes subject to Children's Homes Regulations	30		30
P1 - Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	15		15
R1 - Residential care home	2		2
R2 - NHS/Health Trust	1		1
R5 - Young Offender Institution or prison	3		3

S1 - All Residential schools	2		2
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering	32	1	33
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA	51	4	55
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	141	89	230
U5 - Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	2		2
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	156	108	264
Total	480	211	691

- 4.2 In March 2021, 48% of our children in care were placed with in-house foster carers, the remainder were placed with independent fostering agencies, residential units or in semi-independent accommodation, with some being placed at home with their parents and a number placed for adoption.

4.3 Since April 2020 37 households (56 foster carers) were deregistered.

Deregistration reasons	Foster Home
Connected foster carers who secured permanence via a legal order or children turned 18	11
Due to ill health	2
Carer resignation	25
Connected carers where children have returned home	3
Fostering for another council or agency, or moved out of borough	5
Deregistered due to standards for care	3
Retired	7
Grand Total	56

4.4 Other reasons included family issues, wanting to take a break, full-time employment, unhappy with support and no placements for over a year.

5. Training and development

5.1 Training and development of foster carers is important to the service and further specialist training was commissioned and had started at the beginning of 2020/2021. The training provides experienced and newly approved foster carers opportunities to learn how best to meet the needs of our children, including our most complex who are likely to be traumatised.

5.2 Training has included:

- Research in Practice and Foster Talk tools and research
- Trauma informed practice (delivered by systemic clinical therapists)
- Gangs (delivered by YOS specialist)
- Children Looked After education (delivered by virtual school)
- Caring for children with disabilities (delivered by disabilities youth service)

5.3 Development for supervising social workers and foster carers has included:

- Systemic clinical therapists facilitating reflective social work conversations with staff to promote better understanding of our children's emotional needs and empower them to support foster carers to meet these needs. They also provide consultations to supervising social workers and have supported foster carers to improve placement stability.
- Structured consultations for foster carers with CAMHS, which are also attended by the supervising social worker and child's social worker.
- Training a cohort of foster carers to deliver UASC specific training which staff also attend to ensure joint learning.
- Systemic practice training for supervising social workers and managers.
- The mentoring programme continues for foster carers.
- Croydon Council continues to support Croydon Foster Carers Association (CFCA) and their work with foster carers.
- Communication and Support: Support groups continued to take place each month facilitated by CFCA but the service plans to expand on this to cover a wider area and need. We plan to expand on our written and direct interaction with carers and increase the opportunities for feedback and challenge.

6. Areas for development: gaps in provision

- Parent and child placements. We do not have any carers who are approved to take a parent or parents and child when parent is over 18 years old.
- Large sibling groups. We do not have any carers who are approved to take 3 or more children as a sibling group.
- Teenagers and children with complex needs, particularly those who have suffered trauma and present with emotional and behavioural needs.

7. Recruitment Activity (April 2020 to March 2021)

7.1 Fostering recruitment was brought back in house in November with a dedicated team with responsibility for attracting and assessing foster carers. There is a revised recruitment and retention strategy which focuses on the rewards of becoming a foster carer, alongside the incentives that we offer and outlining our high level of support. We are keen to attract as many local foster carers as possible, with a target of 30 per year.

7.2 Our offer includes:

- A customer-focused service and a competitive foster carer package
- Robust, bespoke multidisciplinary support

- A transparent, supportive and timely assessment process
- Understanding and supportive supervising social workers who are always 'on the other end of the phone'.

7.3 We will be measuring the outcomes of our strategy with quarterly progress reports to help identify what is working and what needs to improve. This will include:

- Analysis of initial enquiry data
- Analysis of prospective carers' data
- Analysis of referrals
- Analysis of exit interviews/feedback to evidence how services can be improved and promoted
- Analysis of 'drop out' stage in recruitment
- Evaluation of recruitment channels used
- Surveys from newly approved foster carers

8. Marketing

8.1 Marketing and promotion activities have been impacted heavily by restrictions over the past year. Nevertheless, we have carried out a range of activities to promote and market the fostering service. These have included:

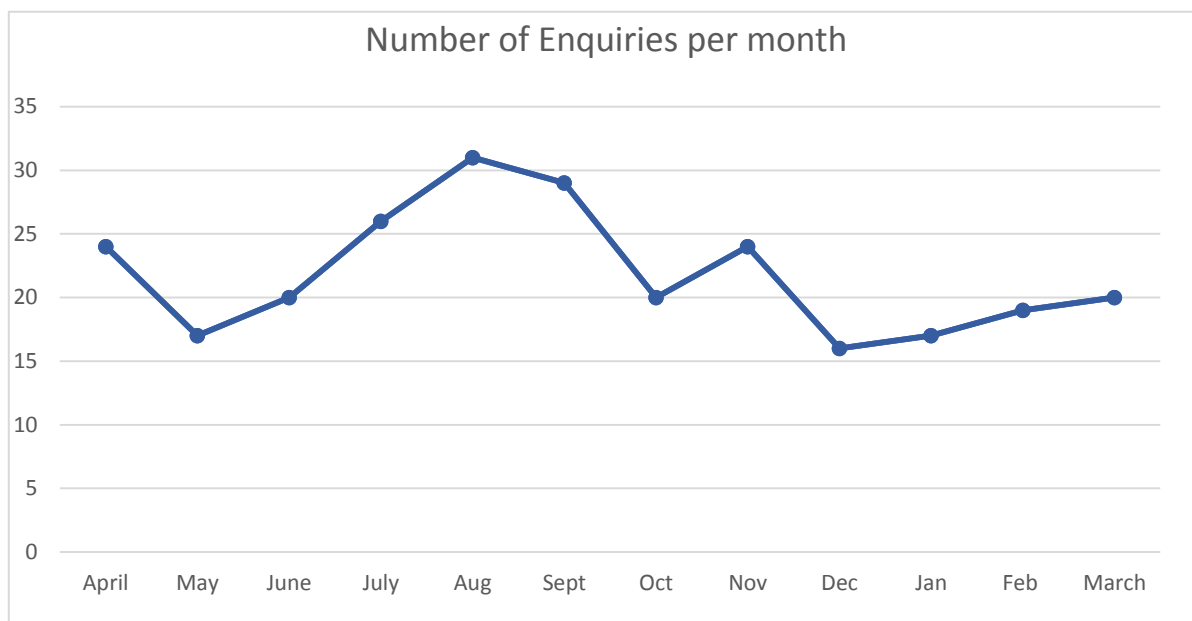
- Council tax flyer inserts to all residents
- JC Decaux advertising boards
- Community engagement through forums or newsletters
- Two marketing activity trials: a contract with Akero, a digital marketing company; and a trial of a promoted live webinar information event

9. Update on recruitment April 2020 – March 2021

(i) Initial Stages of Application

During the period there were 263 enquiries to the fostering recruitment team, the majority via the phone with email and online portal being the next most commonly used methods.

Non-Executive Template



- 9.1 From these enquiries, a total of 51 Initial Home Visits (IHV) were conducted, a conversion rate of 19.3%. The average time from first contact and an IHV being completed was 37 days with delays being in part due to circumstances of the applicant who were making enquiries but were not ready to proceed at that time.
- 9.2 38 households were invited to attend Skills to Foster, with 32 attending. The Skills to Foster is a mandatory for all applicants and forms part of the assessment process. From the 32 households that attended 23 have progressed through to assessment; at the time of writing, seven households had been approved from the cohort who attended after April 2020. A total of 20 households withdrew from the process. The recruitment service has worked closely with EMPIRE to forge links with young people as their contribution is unique.
- 9.3 From April – March 2021, 13 households were approved by Croydon's independent foster panel which is a conversion rate of 4.94% from enquiries; this is within national averages. Given the disruption of Covid, this is an encouraging figure. Assessments were presented to panel within eight months (expected timescale) for 11 of the households with two needing more time for further exploration.
- 9.4 From the 13 households approved, all have had at least one child placed with them. In total, the carers approved in this time period have cared for 18 children and young people.

10. Fostering Panel

10.1 There were a total of 29 Panel dates and 104 matters to consider:

Type of Meeting	Number of Cases	Outcomes
Approvals	13	12 Approved 1 Deferred
Connected Persons/ Family and Friends	21	19 Approved 1 Declined 1 Deferred
First Year Reviews	21	21 Re-approved
3 Yearly Reviews	27	27 Re-approved
De-registration	6 + 1 ongoing	De-registered
Resignations	7	7 Resignations
Long Term Matches	6	6 Matches
Panel updates	2	

10.2 Feedback provided by applicants, foster carers and professionals is that the panel is a warm and positive environment, with the Chair and panel members making applicants feel “at ease” whilst progressing with case discussions. This more “positive feel” to the fostering panel is a welcome improvement as previous feedback was not as good.

10.3 The fostering panel is currently equipped to manage and consider the number of matters that are presented. This situation will be monitored closely in relation to the expected impact of fostering recruitment strategy.

11. Impact of Covid 19

11.1 The introduction of national lockdown in response to the pandemic in March 2020 required the service to adapt and operate on a virtual basis almost overnight; initial home visits, assessments, training sessions, mid-point reviews, DBS risk assessment interviews and Skills to Foster were all delivered online. Many of the external organisations and processes that are relied on were also significantly impacted including GP surgeries, other local authorities, schools, DBS service and wider employers. This did lead to some delay in assessments as the wider system tried to navigate the new way of working. Home visits were all completed via Teams with the exception of the home health and safety assessment; this continued to be completed in person so that the local authority could be reassured that the home was safe and had been visited by a social worker prior to any children being placed.

11.2 The restrictions also prevented most of the recruitment events planned from taking place including the fortnightly information sessions that were normally held at the Town Hall. These were replaced with a pre-recorded video that was available on Youtube for applicants to watch at any time, and eventually live

sessions on Teams which continued on a fortnightly basis. During this reporting period we held a total of 32 live information sessions that were attended by 256 interested households. These were facilitated by the team manager, with a contribution from current foster carers as well as care experienced young people so that the carer and child's journey were understood.

- 11.3 The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on how training and support has been delivered and accessed as it has had to be virtual. This has been particularly challenging for those carers who are not confident or proficient in using technology, as well for those whose personal circumstances do not enable them to engage effectively online.
- 11.4 There have been difficulties for some foster carers who may have needed to shield, or protect others from the likelihood of catching covid, who have had children living with them who have not understood the seriousness of not following lockdown guidance. This has led to some placements breaking down. We understand how difficult it has been to be a foster carer during this period and want to thank all of our foster carers for their dedication and hard work.

12. Key achievements during 2020/21

- Review of the practice standards in the fostering service presented an opportunity to identify the gaps in our practices and put in place an extensive programme of improvement.
- A permanent fostering panel advisor was appointed to support the panel chair. The panel convenes regular business meetings, to reinforce its remit and reflect on its practice. The "Central List" of panel members was extended to increase diversity.
- The appointment of the fostering reviewing officers has help ensure that the 98% (steady number) of our foster carers have had their annual review undertaken in a timely way. The quality of the annual reviews has also significantly improved.
- Foster carer reviews presented at the fostering panel on the first year following approval and then on a 3 yearly cycle routinely happens.
- Extended the Fostering Panels, the panel is now set to support permanency through long term foster care matches.
- Increase in fostering enquiries in the last part of 2019 and some progress in terms of new approvals
- Croydon foster carers respond positively and in general offer our young people the option of "Staying Put" when they reach 18 years old.
- Extensive work has undertaken in terms of improving the working relationships with other social work teams and services (Virtual School,

Health, etc.)

- Foster carer project established to address issues raised by foster carers and the service
- Broadening of training programme with arrangements to deliver foster carer training and develop based on needs for 2020-2021 and beyond.

13. Key priorities for development during 2021/22

- Build on the service's relationships with Foster Carers by using systemic practice and develop confidence, competence and resilience to support children achieve a full sense of stability and security.
- Increase in children achieving permanency either by a court order or by making the arrangements in foster carer permanent. This increases the children sense of belonging and provides them with the stability that will contribute towards their overall well-being.
- Use our placement stability guidance and support children to develop ways of managing their difficulties and carers to provide non-judgmental and nurturing care that is supported by systemic practice.
- Reviewing and developing foster carer support groups (to include specific groups for connected carers)
- Where appropriate increase the utilisation of our foster carers, as mentors, ambassadors, support group facilitators, etc.
- Improve retention through improving benefits package available to foster carers as well and as a more responsive service
- Development of training programme tailored to their own needs and development, this includes wider access to the systemic practice and other therapeutic parenting and online resources.
- Reinforcing the expectations around Staying Put and making the related information more clear for carers and staff.
- Improving the digital presence of Croydon Council Fostering Service.
- Improve carers understanding of the issues around leaving care and preparing young people for independence.
- Increase involvement of young people in training for our Foster carers and Young People being involved in Skills to Foster Training.
- Increase participation of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers, to help shape the fostering service.

Non-Executive Template

- Foster Carer Handbook – to review the handbook and continue work on offering the option of having a digital link to the handbook in the future.
- Enhance our links with the professional network around the child.
- Enabling the service to learn from Ofsted inspections and other service reviews.
- Increase the number of approved carers in line with the sufficiency strategy.

14. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

None.

15. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

None.

16. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

None.

17. EQUALITIES IMPACT

None.

18. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

None.

19. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

None.

CONTACT OFFICER: *Hannah Doughty, Head of Service – Children Looked After and Care Leavers.*



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

April 2021 to March 2022

Date of review March 2021

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The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 Part 2 state that a fostering service must compile a written statement of purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which are provided.

The Statement of Purpose is a significant document that sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering service. It must be consistent with relevant legislation, regulations, National Minimum Standards (NMS) and statutory guidance. The statement must be child focused and show how the fostering service will help children achieve positive outcomes.

The manager of the Fostering Service must ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner consistent with the Statement of Purpose. This document will be reviewed at least once annually. Any amendments due to changes in legislation or guidance will be incorporated into a new Statement of Purpose.

The Statement of Purpose makes reference to the Croydon Foster Carer Charter. The Croydon Foster Carer Charter has been jointly produced by Croydon Foster Carers and London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service. It is a shared agreement setting out the mutual expectations and responsibilities of both foster carers and Croydon Council. The charter confirms The Corporate Parenting commitment to provide the best care for the children we look after. The Charter is a statement of Croydon's commitment to ensuring that, unless the child's needs require otherwise, the children in our care will be looked after in a family environment that is safe and nurturing and that supports them to achieve their full potential as individuals. The Charter is our recognition of the crucial daily role that foster carers have in the lives of the children they have welcomed into their homes and families.

The Charter is attached to this report.

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2021/2022

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Croydon Council Fostering Service. The Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011 require all Fostering Services to provide a written annual Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and the services and facilities provided. The information to be contained in the Statement of Purpose is prescribed in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Statement of Purpose is to be regularly reviewed and formally updated every twelve months. This document is made available, upon request, to foster carers and prospective foster carers, any child placed by the service, the parent of any child looked after and staff. It is also available on Croydon Council website.

The Statement is informed by:

- Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services
- Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011
- The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011

Values, Aims and Objectives

Croydon Council Fostering Service is committed to providing safe, excellent and professional foster care for every Croydon child that needs this service, in compliance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards and the Paramountcy Principle of The Children Act 1989. The most significant themes that run through the latest Standards and Regulations are:

- the foster carer as a parental figure
- the child as an active agent of change
- the importance of relationships

Values - Children

In line with the values and priorities set by the Council, the fostering teams aim to work in partnership with children in care, parents & colleagues across the Council and with other agencies to ensure that children in care have the same opportunities as all children within the borough. This is achieved by offering placement choices so that children are matched to a carer who can then be supported in meeting their needs.

Positive experiences in the foster home contribute to the achievement of all of the five outcomes identified in the Every Child Matters agenda: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being.

Croydon Fostering Service is committed to reducing the number of children placed with independent fostering agencies and continues to invest resources in increasing placement choices and the quality of in-house provisions. The service works closely with children's services within social care to meet the needs of children and with foster carers to continuously improve and develop the service.

The service is committed to recruiting, maintaining, supporting and training foster carers from wide range of diverse backgrounds. The diverse needs of Croydon's children and young people in terms of sexuality, ethnicity and disability require the service to address these issues with foster carers during the assessment process and after approval, and to be supported to meet these needs and feel supported in relation to their own identity.

The aims of Croydon Fostering Service are:

- To ensure that the right placement is made for the child at the right time and without delay, with clear action plans agreed to ensure the earliest achievement of desired outcomes for each child.
- To have a robust, transparent and efficient process of recruiting foster carers.
- To recruit, assess, and approve more than sufficient foster carers, within the nationally prescribed timescales, who can meet most, if not all, of the needs of every child referred to the Fostering Service.

- To ensure that a good match is achieved in all placements, and that any obstacles or potential delays are identified and dealt with at every step of the matching process.
- To provide children and young people fostered, and foster carers with handbooks which are a guide to foster care.
- To provide fostering support service to foster carers to enable a child to remain with a foster family and to ensure that the child reaches their full potential.
- To provide support, supervision and staff care for all those engaged by the Fostering Service.
- To provide opportunities for foster carers to increase their skills and knowledge in fostering through the provision of training and development.

Named Persons

Registered Person: Debbie Jones, Executive Director, Children, Families and Education Department.

Registered Manager: Brian Amos, Service Manager, Fostering Service.

Fostering Agency Decision Maker (ADM): Roisin Madden, Director, Children & Families, Early Help and Children's Social Care; the ADM role for fostering decisions is delegated to the Head of Service for Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers (SWwCLA/CL), **Hannah Doughty**.

Qualifications and Experience

All senior and middle managers are qualified social workers and are registered with Social Work England.

Organisation and Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Croydon's People Department. The Head of Service, SWwCLA/CL is responsible for the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service and social workers are responsible for fostering placements and management of the assessment, recruitment, support, supervision and development of applicants and approved foster carers.

The current structure of the Fostering Service is designed to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services' National Minimum Standards, The Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance relating to the delivery of Fostering Services.

There are four fostering teams within the Fostering Service that are part of the Social Work with Children Looked After and Care Leavers Service.

The Fostering Service is led by the Fostering Service Manager. Supervision and support teams 1, 2 & 3 and the recruitment team are led by team managers.

The supervision and support teams provide support, supervision and development to Croydon's approved foster carers, with managers taking lead responsibility for key practice areas, for example, foster carers' support groups, continuous professional development training and Staying Put.

The recruitment team is the first point of contact for people who are thinking about becoming a foster carer for Croydon. They screen potential applicants and, where relevant, go on to carry out the necessary assessment and training.

The Fostering Service has a staffing establishment of:

Service Manager: 1
Team Managers: 4
Assessing Social Workers: 3
Supervising Social Workers: 18
External Sessional Assessors: 6
Fostering Reviewing Officers: 2
Business Support Officers: 3

Relevant qualifications and experiences of staff

All Social Work Managers and Social Workers hold social work qualifications and are registered with the Social Work England and have relevant experiences working with children and families.

Services provided

The fostering teams provide a range of fostering services:

Task focused or short term foster carers who provide placements for children and young people at the point of need and in accordance with their care plan, either to return to birth family or to move to a permanent placement.

Permanent or long-term foster carers who make a commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach independence.

Connected persons carers, often known as family and friends carers are foster carers approved to look after a specific child or children. These carers are family members or friends who knew the family, child or children before they became looked after by Croydon.

Foster to adopt foster carers who are approved adopters, temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child, where the intention and Local Authority care plan is that the child will be adopted by this family

Parent and child foster carers a specialist type of fostering where a parent often a mother and their baby stays with the foster carer for a short time.

The Fostering Task

The task of securing high quality foster care includes:

- Advertising for and recruiting prospective foster carers;
- Quality assuring the assessment of prospective carers under Regulation 26 (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011) for approval by the Fostering Panel or, in the case of family and friends carers or connected persons conducting planned assessments for temporary approvals in accordance with Regulation 24 (The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010) assessments;
- Consultation with other professionals, foster carers and families around making appropriate placements for children and 'matching' children with carers who can meet their needs;
- Family-finding for children needing permanent placements, support and supervision of foster carers in their work with children, children's families, departmental social workers and other professionals;
- Attendance at various professional meetings to ensure that foster carers are actively supported in carrying out a child's individual care plan;
- Completion of annual reviews with foster carers;
- Delivering a programme of on-going training for foster carers;
- Support and training in completing the Children Workforce Development Council Standards for Foster Carers (TSD);
- Contributing to investigations into complaints and allegations made against carers and supporting them through the process;
- Providing daily fostering duty service from 9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday;
- An out of hours support service for foster carers requiring advice about a child in their care during evenings and at weekends;
- An out of hours rota of supervising social workers providing advice and support to foster carers during evenings and at weekends;
- Working in partnership with the Croydon Foster Carers Association.

Procedures and processes for recruiting, approving and reviewing Foster Carers

Recruitment

The two staged approach, known as Stage One and Stage Two are followed to support applicants to find out more about fostering and to assess their suitability to care for children looked after and become registered foster carers.

Stage One

Includes undertaking a range of statutory and reference checks and offering preparation training.

Stage Two

Involves the in-depth assessment, also known as the Home Study.

Interested applicants can find out about fostering by telephone, completion of an online application form, visit Bernard Wetherill House or attend one of the frequently held information sessions held at the Town Hall. Details of this process are described in the Croydon Information Pack for Foster Carer Applicants which is available online on the Croydon Website, www.croydon.gov.uk/fostering. The Croydon Fostering Service also has a dedicated phone number (**0300 222 2112**) and an email address: iwanttofooster@croydon.gov.uk.

The aim is to provide applicants with ongoing support, advice and information at each stage of the preparation process, whilst also assessing in a transparent way their suitability to become registered foster carers and provide safe and quality care to Croydon's children looked after and young people.

Information Meeting

All enquirers are invited to attend an information meeting run by fostering social workers and current foster carers who can discuss their fostering experiences. This is not required although applicants are encouraged to attend these valuable sessions.

The purpose of these sessions is to provide people with basic information about fostering, explain what Croydon Council is looking for and outline the preparation and assessment process. At the meeting, details of attendees are recorded and feedback is sought to support continued development of the service and to help evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment methods.

Initial Telephone Assessment

This is completed by one of the assessment social workers to gather more details from applicants, establish their current circumstances and to provide them with more information about fostering for Croydon. When there is the potential to progress further, an assessing social worker will undertake an initial home visit to gather more information about the applicant and to provide them with further details. If this is possible for the service and the applicants, they are invited to submit their application which triggers the start of Stage One.

Skills to Foster Group Training

The main purpose of the groups is for training and to provide more details about the role and tasks of fostering. Direct information is provided by way of presentations and DVDs; there are small and large group discussions and exercises, and applicants are encouraged to participate fully in the discussions through case studies.

The training and groups are co-led by a social worker from the fostering team and experienced foster carers. An important secondary purpose is evaluation and applicants are informed at the beginning that the facilitators' observations will form part of the assessment process. Applicants may also be counselled out at this stage as the groups will encourage them to explore their own motivation, strengths, and abilities to foster, helping them to decide whether fostering is right for them.

Statutory Checks and References

The Fostering Service provides administrative support in managing all statutory checks, medicals and DBS. The Service will take appropriate action on DBS disclosures as soon as possible and before they are presented to the Fostering Panel.

Written references are required from three personal referees who must be interviewed by the assessing social worker. A report attached to the Form F should give details of these interviews, including the worker's assessment of the references

Other checks include:

- The applicants' employer (continuity of employment must be addressed and any gaps investigated)
- Previous partners
- The applicants' children's school
- A full medical history
- Evaluation of financial stability
- Safeguarding and Criminal Records (DBS checks).

Regulation 26(5) prohibits the approval of any person as a prospective foster carer where they or any member of their household is known to have a conviction or caution for specific offences. All offences must be brought to the attention of the Panel chairperson and the Fostering Service Manager who will decide whether or not to proceed with the assessment. This also concludes stage 1 of the assessment process.

The Assessment of Foster Carer applicants using objective, robust, fair, and transparent criteria.

All applicants are assessed by an individual process to establish their suitability to be registered as a foster carer, in accordance with Regulation 26 and 27. The Foster Carers' Report (Form F or Form C for connected persons) will be used to record the assessment and the format for assessment interviews will normally follow the guidelines. Applicants are encouraged to engage fully in the preparation of the assessment, including providing evidence and completing certain sections themselves where possible.

As well as the general areas covered in the Form F guidelines all assessments must

cover the following specific issues:

- Health, including use of alcohol and tobacco.
- The applicant's own background and attitude to issues of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability.
- Any issues of concern identified from statutory checks or referee interviews.

Under the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011, the expectation is that prospective foster carers' completed reports will be presented to the Fostering Panel within eight months of application. However, within Croydon the aim is to achieve this within a three month timescale.

The completed Foster Carers' Report (Form F/Form C) is shared with the applicant(s), who will retain a copy. If applicants are unhappy with any of the content of the report the assessing worker should seek first to deal with this by negotiation. If this is not possible the applicants are invited to submit their own comments in writing for presentation to the Fostering Panel. All applicants are expected to attend Panel in person.

All Prospective Foster Carers' Report (Form F/Form C) are quality assured by the recruitment team manager; the Form F/Form C must also be signed by the assessing worker and the applicant(s).

The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel is chaired by an independent person who ensures that the panel is able to fulfil its quality assurance function free of undue influence. The Panel is constituted from a central list in line with fostering regulations and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. The Panel meets three times a month or, as and when required, and is supported by a panel adviser and administrator.

The statutory functions of the panel are:

- To consider applications for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable or not to become a foster carer and to recommend the number and age to be placed.
- To consider the first annual review of the foster carer and other subsequent annual reviews that are referred to it.
- To ensure the assessments undertaken by the assessor are balanced and of sufficient quality.
- To advise and monitor the effectiveness of procedures. To offer advice and make recommendations on any other matter or cases referred to panel by the Fostering Service.
- Consider Standard of Care issues and make recommendations as necessary.
- Consider matching of children with foster carers where the plan is for children to remain in long term foster care.
- Decisions are made by Croydon's Agency Decision Maker after considering the

recommendations of the panel.

Presentation of Assessment Report to the Fostering Panel

The assessing social worker must attend the Fostering Panel in person to present the prospective foster carer's report. Applicants are expected to attend the Panel. The Panel will make one of three recommendations:

- Recommend to the Agency Decision Maker approval of the applicant as a foster carer.
- Recommend to the Agency Decision Maker that the applicant is not approved as a foster carer.
- Defer - ask for further information on any relevant matter.

Foster carer applicants are given written information explaining the panel process and are positively encouraged to attend. Their feedback is sought as Croydon and the Panel are committed to continuous learning and seek to consider any developments and improvements they may need to make. The feedback is collated and considered by the Service and Panel twice a year.

Connected Persons Assessment.

Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) 2010 provides for the temporary placement of a child with a relative or friend who is not an approved carer for a period of up to sixteen weeks. If the child is to remain beyond sixteen weeks a further eight week extension can be agreed by the Head of Service.

Before the temporary approval expires the carer must be approved under Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. Immediate placements under Regulation 24 may only be made provided that prior to placement:

- the carer and all other persons in the household over 18, have been interviewed;
- the accommodation has been inspected;
- information has been obtained about all other members of the household;
- the carer is a relative or friend or other person connected to the child (a friend being normally defined as someone previously known to the child and a connected person someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity);
- notification in writing setting out the terms of the approval, followed by a written agreement made between the carer and the Local Authority covering the matters set out in schedule 5 to the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; and
- The authority is satisfied that the placement is the most suitable way of performing their duty under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989. The child's social worker will complete a referral form, initiate DBS and other checks and refer the matter to the Fostering Service. The manager leading on recruitment and assessment will then allocate a social worker to carry out a Regulation 24 assessment of the friend and family carer with a view

to seeking specific approval at the Fostering Panel within sixteen weeks. In exceptional circumstances temporary approvals can be extended for up to twenty four weeks.

Applicants Not Approved By Panel

The Agency Decision Maker will write to all applicants whose applications were not recommended for approval by the Panel and will advise the applicants of their qualified determination. The letter will give the reasons for this and advise the applicants of the various appeal routes available including the **Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)**.

An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of fostering

Croydon Council Fostering Service works to the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy, which is available to all staff via the Council's intranet.

The Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the assessment and recruitment process. Applicants wishing to be approved as foster carers will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation or disability and on the basis of being able to parent and to meet the needs of children looked after.

Foster Carer Annual Reviews

The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011, Regulation 28 requires that carers be reviewed at least once a year. A review can be held at other times if there has been a significant change in circumstances or if concerns arise.

The review considers the foster carer's previous year of fostering and make recommendations about their continued fostering registration. Reviews are carried out in the carer's home and are chaired by a fostering reviewing officer, who will consider the recommendation of the social worker and will make their own recommendation based on the evidence in written reports and the discussion held in the review meeting.

All registered foster carers in the household must attend the review meeting.

The views of children, their social workers, independent reviewing officer, birth parents and the fostering family will be sought in the annual review. Health and safety checks will be completed annually and DBS and medical references are updated every second or third year.

The first review is presented to the Fostering Panel and then every three years thereafter.

Continuous Professional Development

A comprehensive training programme is provided for all carers which is reviewed annually. Foster carers have access to CSCP and online line training available to borough staff.

The Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers (TSD).

All carers are expected to complete the Standards within the first year of registration. Ongoing workshops are delivered throughout the year supporting foster carers in completing the Training and Development Standards for Foster Carers.

Carers are expected to complete a minimum of 30 hours training in their first year of approval and a minimum of 20 in subsequent years. A Personal Development Plan (PDP) will be completed annually with all Croydon foster carers and reviewed at their annual review meeting.

Support, Supervision and Development of Croydon Foster Carers

All registered carers will have an allocated supervising social worker who is responsible for ensuring an appropriate level of support and supervision is offered for foster carers to successfully undertake their work in supporting, meeting the needs and improving the outcomes for children in their care.

Supervising social workers will ensure that carers have access to necessary support, advice and training to carry out their roles and responsibilities. This will vary from carer to carer, but will include all of the following:

- Complete a Foster Care Agreement with all Carers (Regulation 27 (5) Schedule 5 of Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011).
- Ensure the carer has an adequate supply of equipment.
- Ensure that carers have an up-to-date copy of the Croydon Foster Carers' Handbook.
- Ensure that carers are provided with up-to-date details of procedures and policies, including the Complaints and Suggestions Procedure, payment procedures and the service's insurance policy for carers.
- Carers automatically become members of the Croydon Foster Care Association and receive membership to Foster Talk.
- Visit the carers on a six weekly basis and whenever reasonably requested by carers or as deemed necessary by the agency to support and supervise a carer.
- Make at least one unannounced visit per annum.
- Carry out an annual health and safety inspection of the carer's home, or when the carer moves or has major work carried out on their home, and this is considered at each annual review.
- Ensure that the carer is recording placement details as stipulated by Croydon Fostering Service
- Carry out an annual review of the carer's approval.

- Identify, in conjunction with the carer, any training needs/core requirements and identify for training profile purposes ways in which these may be met.
- Attend reviews, case conferences and other planning meetings in respect of children placed when requested by the carer or the IRO.
- Investigate any complaint by or against carers' standards of care in accordance with relevant procedures.
- Ensure that lines of communication between the carer and the child's social worker are open and effective.
- Respond promptly to telephone calls and correspondence from the carer.
- Keep a record of their visits, share these with foster carers and record these on CRS.
- Supervising social workers ensure that visits are arranged in such a way that there is adequate time to address the carer's own role and development in addition to any visits that may be necessary in respect of individual placements. Carers' children are also provided with opportunities to discuss their experiences of fostering.

Foster Carer Charter

Croydon Council has drawn up an agreed Croydon Foster Carer Charter that sets out the expectations and responsibilities of the Croydon Fostering Service, Croydon Foster Carers and other people involved in the care of children looked after. This is available to on the website

Financial Allowance Policy

Approved Croydon foster carers are paid a weekly amount, which is made up of a fee and a maintenance element. The fee element is paid to the carers as recognition of the skills, responsibilities and experience that they bring to the fostering task. The maintenance element covers the costs of caring for the child/children in their care.

Upon approval all foster carers are eligible for a setting up grant of up to £500 [subject to the provision of receipts]. In addition to the normal payments for caring for foster children, foster carers are paid an annual holiday payment. All children in placement receive birthday, festival and holiday allowances.

Connected Persons

Foster carers approved as connected persons (family and friends carers) receive a weekly maintenance allowance. However, the Council also pays the remuneration element to all connected persons carers who have been approved and have completed the full preparation training. Connected persons are also entitled to the setting up grant.

Equipment

Equipment e.g. pushchair or buggy, sheets, latex gloves, wardrobes, beds etc., can be ordered and delivered direct to the foster carer's home.

Newsletter

A Newsletter, edited by members of the fostering team, is produced on a regular basis to keep carers informed of:

- Advice on practice
- Changes to policy
- General information on fostering
- Staff movements within the fostering team

Croydon Foster Carers Association

There is an established Croydon Foster Carers Association that is run and managed by the foster carers through a management committee. The Fostering Service Manager and other team managers attend meetings with the association approximately four times a year and the annual general meeting.

Support Group

A monthly foster carer support group is held, funded and supported with fostering team managers in attendance.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers

Where there are complaints about the standards of care provided by a foster carer these are managed by the service. If there are allegations of inappropriate behaviour by foster carers, these are managed through the procedures for allegations agreed by Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership. These procedures are in line with the Department of Education guidance outlined in "Handling Allegations of Abuse made against Adults who Work with Children and Young People". The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) process is also involved in the management of allegations against foster carers.

Complaints from Foster Carers

Complaints about the service are dealt with under the Corporate Services Complaints procedure, which can be accessed via Croydon Council website or by calling Tel: 020 8726 6000 ext 62753 or at complaints@croydon.gov.uk

Registration Authority

The address & contact telephone number for the OFSTED Registration Authority is:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings, St Anne's Sq.
Manchester M2 7LATel: 08456 404040
www.ofsted.gov.uk

The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually and is available to view on the Croydon Website.

The Statement of Purpose is available to anyone working for the purposes of the fostering service, with children who may be in our care including families, professionals and legal guardians, and anyone wishing to become a foster carer.

The information contained in this Statement of Purpose can be made available in alternative formats: large print, braille, audio tape or disk. We can also translate the information into other languages.

Please contact:

Croydon Council Fostering Service:
4th Floor, Bernard Weatherill House
8 Mint Walk, Croydon
CR0 1EA.

By Freephone: 0800 389 0129
By Telephone: 0207 760 6000.
By email: fosteringenquiries@croydon.gov.uk
By e-mail: www.croydon.gov.uk/fostering

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Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

Jan 2021 to Dec 2023

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Introduction

The Croydon Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy is to increase the in-house fostering capacity each year to enable our looked after children and young people to be placed in well matched, stable homes where they can reach their full potential. As of 21 December 2020 there were 226 fostering households. 88 of these were friends and family households, with the fostering service having 138 households that could potentially provide homes for non-familial children and young people.

On 31 October 2020 Croydon brought fostering recruitment and assessment in-house. The fostering service now has its own dedicated recruitment team, comprising of a team manager, a marketing officer, recruitment officers, assessing social workers and business support. This improved model will give Croydon greater control and flexibility in how it develops and implements its foster carer recruitment strategy, keeping a close eye on the changing demographics of the borough and its CLA population.

This recruitment strategy should be read in conjunction with the foster carer marketing and recruitment plan and the fostering service development plan.

Aims and Objectives

The key aims and objectives of this strategy are follows:

- To improve local foster care placement choice and stability for children and young people in Croydon, particularly for teenagers and children requiring short break care
- To increase the number of in-house foster placements and reduce the use of independent fostering agencies and residential care

Our target is to recruit at least 30 additional foster carers annually.

National Context

According to figures released by the Department for Education in December 2019 (CLA in England 2018-2019) the number of children in care had risen to 78,150 by 31 March 2019, an increase by 4%. 72% of looked after children are cared for in foster placements, 39% of the CLA population are children aged 10 to 15. According to the Fostering Network fostering services need to recruit a further 7,220 foster families nationally over the next 12 months. In London this equates to around another 900 fostering families.

Having the right placement in the right place at the right time is critical to achieving placement stability and the best outcomes for our looked after children

Local Context – Croydon

Croydon is large and diverse as a borough in both size and population, with areas of considerable wealth and others amongst the most deprived in the country. It is the 70th most deprived authority out of 326 district authorities and the 19th most deprived borough in London, with notably more deprivation in the north and east of the borough than in the south and the west. Croydon has a higher proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds than the national average, with the younger population being more diverse than the older. In 2020 Croydon's looked after children were formed of 39% from a White background, 33% from a Black or Black British background, 5% Asian and 22% from a mixed or other cohort.

Croydon has the largest child population in London, over 93,500 of our residents are aged 0-18 and 57,500 are of statutory school age. The children looked after rate of 86 per 10,000 population at 31 March 2019 is higher than both the national average of 64 and Croydon's statistical neighbours with an average of 55.

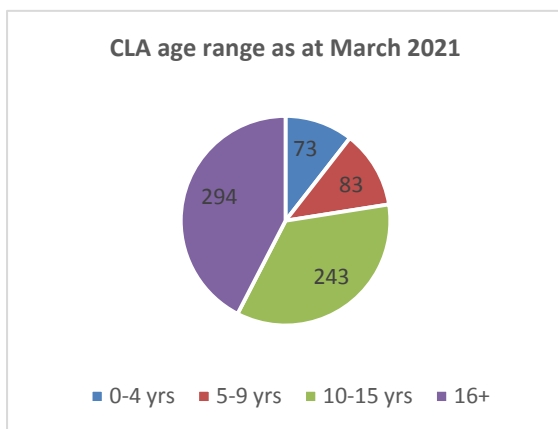
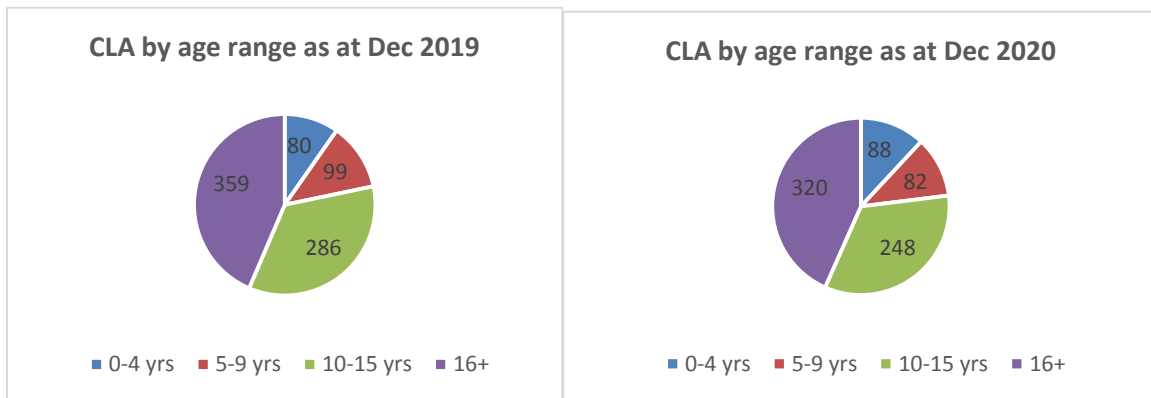
The number of Children Looked After as of March 2021 was 693. Of these, around 490 are from local families and around 213 are unaccompanied asylum seeking children. This is the highest rate in London and the 17th highest in England and needs to be considered as part of the recruitment strategy. The plan is to focus on recruiting fostering households who can also offer placements to children who are from our UASC population.

A high proportion of Croydon's children looked after are placed with foster carers (84%). There is good placement stability with 72% of our CLA remaining in the same placement for at least two years and 82% benefit from placements within a 20 mile radius.

To meet Croydon's aim to recruit 30 new households in year one will mean applying a range of promotion strategies, to ensure there is good placement choice for children and young people. This is particularly true in relation to increasing placement choice for adolescents, unaccompanied minors and those at risk of child sexual exploitation, gang involvement and offending. Croydon has a higher rate of first time entrants into the youth justice system than the London and national average. Many of these young people have been traumatised and their behaviour can reflect this. In addition we have a number of children with disabilities who have different needs and there will be a focus on recruiting foster carers with additional and relevant skills who can offer short break or longer term care to these often vulnerable children.

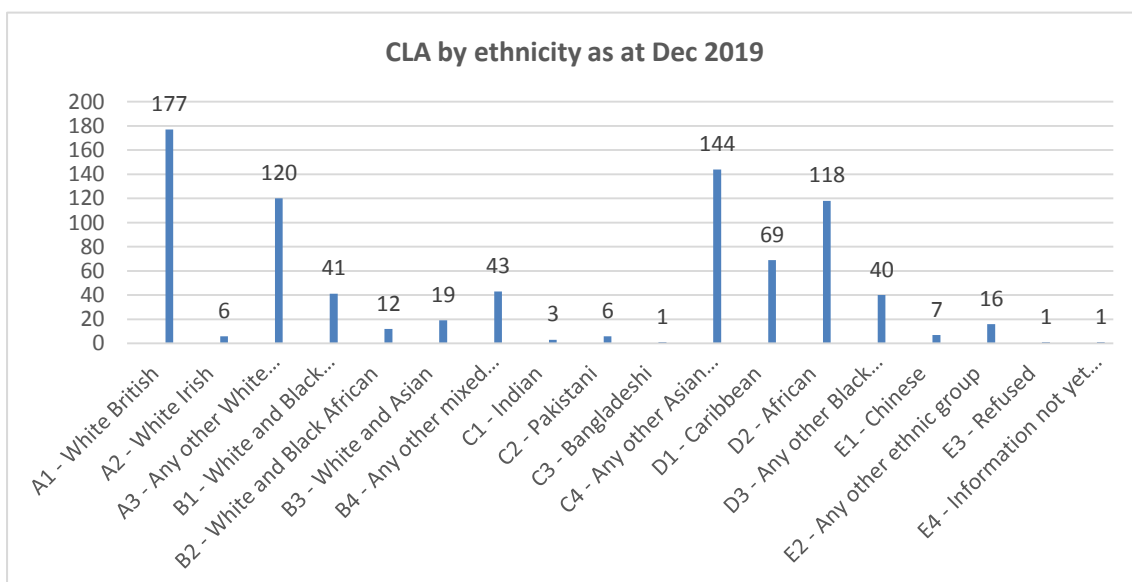
Another priority cohort of children identified in the above report includes children with a disability. In relation to fostering provision the 2021/23 strategy will include a focus on recruiting foster carers with additional, relevant skills to offer short break or longer term care to this vulnerable group requiring safe alternative care.

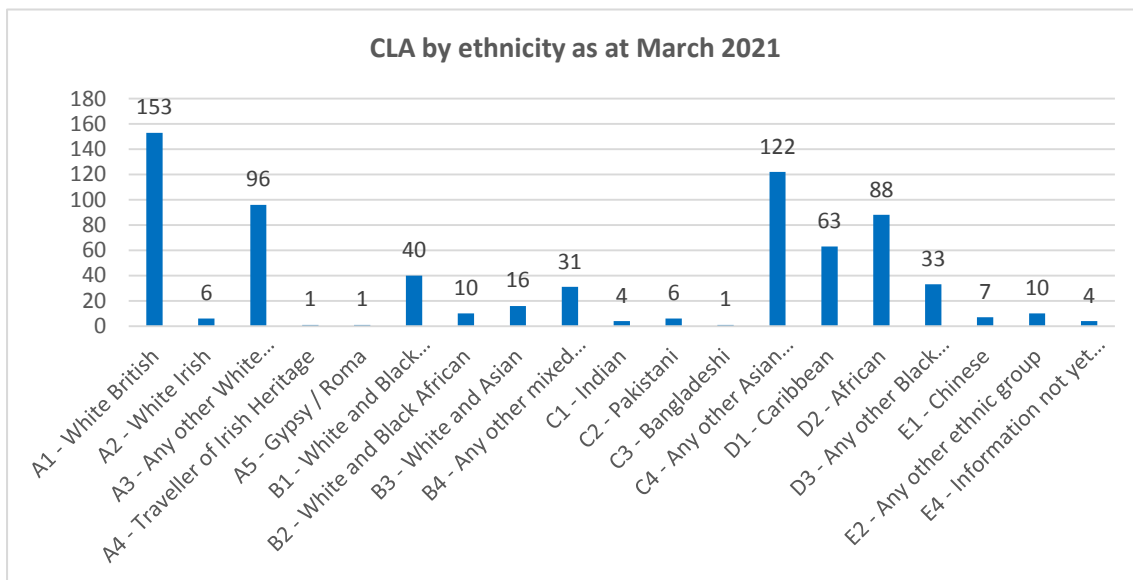
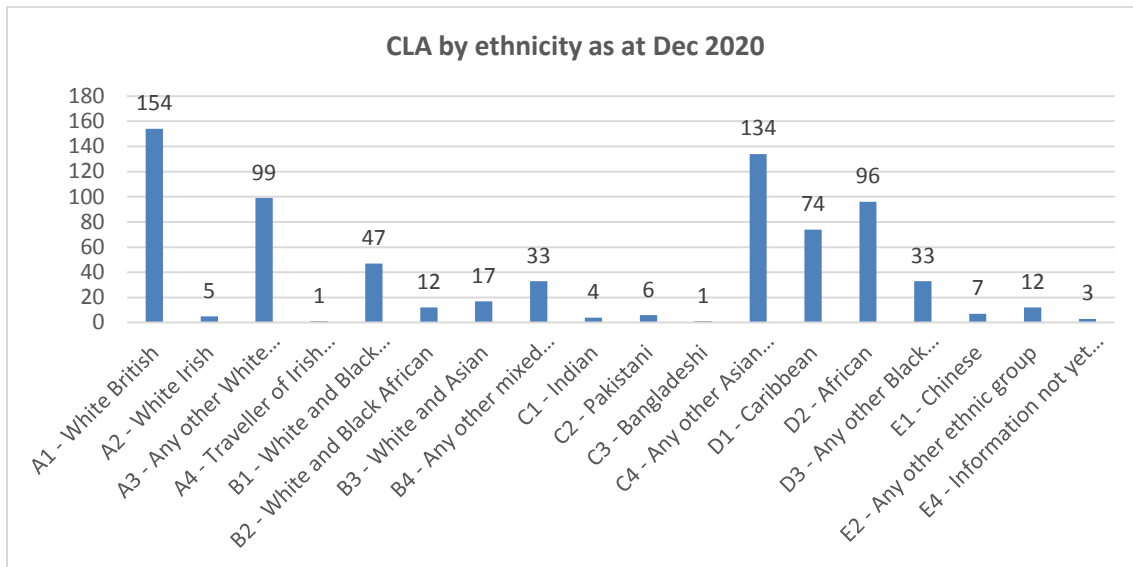
The following data identifies where the pressures are and how where to focus the recruitment:



What is evident from this series of data is that over the last 3 years the 16+ cohort accounted for around 43% of our CLA population; the 10-15 years cohort accounted for around 34%.

The next set of charts will help to highlight the ethnic breakdown of these cohort of children/young people, to further focus this strategy.





From the March 2021 data:

<p>White British</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% of 16+ cohort • 25% of 10-15 years cohort • 27% of CLA population 	<p>Any other Asian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% of 16+ cohort • 22% of 10-15 years cohort • 21% of CLA population
<p>Any other White</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45% of 16+ cohort • 17% of 10-15 years cohort • 23% of CLA population 	<p>African</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of 16+ cohort • 34% of 10-15 years cohort • 24% of CLA population

Approaches and Attention

To achieve our recruitment targets and meet our aims and objectives our approach will be to adopt a multi-faceted marketing approach utilising various channels to reach our key audience(s). This will include some partnership working where possible with local businesses, community groups as well as schools and colleges. We will utilise our existing foster carers as advocates in our marketing and publicity.

The focus of this will be to:

1. Raise awareness of the need for more foster carers as well as educate people on what foster carers do, who can foster and how rewarding it can be
2. Convert more people thinking about fostering by engagement, either face to face, on the phone or via the website and communicating the strengths of working with Croydon Council

Marketing activity will be targeted towards our demographics as a borough and of our children in care, concentrating on people living within 10 miles of Croydon. We will not exclude anyone based on their sexual orientation, ethnicity or gender. The recruitment team will continue to liaise with a range of (existing and new) partners, to raise awareness of the need for more Muslim foster carers. Croydon's own Muslim recruitment champions will be able to further this aspect of the strategy. We will uphold the fostering brand identity and focus on key messages highlighting the positives of being a foster carer. The full plan for annual activities and how they will be measured are set out in the marketing plan (see attached).

The recruitment team have worked collaboratively with colleagues in the fostering support team as well as forging useful links with those foster carers who have been willing to support us at various recruitment events. By employing a care experienced young person to work as a recruitment assistant we have been able to make sure that the voice of our children is reflected within our marketing materials and events. We are also ensuring that our children in care council (Empire) have been able to feedback about our materials and suggest ideas for recruitment.

Croydon has an active Foster Carers Association and attending meetings will continue to be beneficial to encourage our current foster carers to recommend a friend or relative who may want to become a foster carer. We have also reviewed and increased the fees and allowances we pay so that our offer is competitive.

Croydon's recruitment strategy outlines and complies with statutory requirements - ensuring that, the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and (England) Regulations 2011 are met fully in the recruitment, assessment, approval, review and support of foster carers.

Fostering Marketing/Recruitment Statistics and Analysis

In light of the above, the sufficiency data, identified priorities and Croydon's on going improvement journey the recruitment activity to be undertaken can be viewed in the summary below.

<p>Level of enquiries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 281 fostering enquires have been generated this calendar year. This can increase further during 2021 and beyond.
<p>Brand recognition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Akin to other agencies it is likely that over 30% of carers contact other agencies before approaching the Council. This implies an opportunity to improve the brand recognition of the Council as a provider of fostering. Communications and Design teams recommend a continuation of the current brand design with minimal change.
<p>Recommending the Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carers will recommend their local council to others if they feel valued and supported. Anecdotal evidence suggests there have been few formal recommendations in the period from April 2020 and we want to increase these by offering support and working with our current carers. The revised fees and allowances will aid recruitment and will be highlighted.
<p>Involve carers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster carers are positive about being involved in recruitment and Croydon's carers are no different. Carers are likely to be interested in contributing informally e.g. through talking to people, holding coffee mornings or being part of a drop in session. Carer champions to aid recruitment can be grown further. Year One has benefited from some excellent carer involvement at pop up events Having information packs and guidance about the types of carers most needed would be particularly helpful for carers.

Croydon’s marketing and recruitment plan (summary narratives)

a. Recruitment Core Narrative

We know from experience and research that residents are predominately Pioneers*. Therefore, they are more persuaded to act only if they are persuaded that this is “the right thing to do”, that Fostering is the right thing to do. The continued marketing approach into year two will therefore focus on the ethical value of fostering alongside the reward, incentives and high level support provided to carers.

The key messages are:

- Being a foster carer is an amazing thing to do. It will not only change the lives of the young people you support but it will enhance your life positively as well. And because we know it is such a big step to take we will make sure you are well paid for doing this – in fact you should think about being a foster parent as a career opportunity.
- Fostering in Croydon is changing, improved fees and allowances and an excellent training package.
- We [Croydon] think getting the right people is crucial so we see you becoming part of a much bigger family of other foster parents, officers and young people.
- We [Croydon and residents] are a team and that means we will all be in this together. If you have a spare room and a willingness to go for it then we will support and advise you so that this becomes one of the great decisions in your life.
- Most of all, you get a chance to give someone the head-start in life that they really need. We really look forward to hearing from you.

b. Marketing Core Narrative

To achieve the overarching objective to communicating our key messages to residents, marketing mechanisms would include:

Method / Source	Action
On-line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council website and fostering micro to be updated with Key Messages – inviting residents to get involved – ‘Be a Life Changer’. • More interactive clips representing the views of young people and the diversity of Croydon carers.

<p>On-line: social media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases about the various information events happening across the borough. Partners will be invited to support the campaign by re-tweeting (Twitter) or 'liking' (Facebook) our messages. • Improve online presence by scoping other online forums, e.g. influencers, online communities and blogging.
<p>Public Relations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular articles and blogs from carers would be released to local press. • In-house Fostering Newsletter production to be used to mobilise. This newsletter will share good news stories of the service as well as features and news/event stories. Encourage Word of mouth enquiries. • The newsletter will focus on how existing carers can expand their capacity and to take active part in the recruitment campaign. • My Croydon and Internal Communications.
<p>Direct Marketing – literature distribution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each council letter dispatched to a resident to have fostering information for example via the Council tax letters
<p>Build support among elected members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will seek to engage elected members in supporting our strategy, engaging the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning (currently Alisa Fleming).
<p>Advertising Board/ Public Spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresh the existing Croydon recruitment banners / boards, to include inspiring messages. • Strategically positioning recruitment banners / boards within Croydon, where there is significant pedestrian traffic. • The use of advertising specialists (like JC Decaux and Clear Channel direct) to be explored and boarding to be utilised for example

Positioning Croydon

An additional aim of this strategy is to position Croydon as the preferred agency to foster for. The aim is to influence potential foster carers and retain existing ones, so they will feel proud to foster for brand Croydon.

We are therefore positioning Croydon Fostering as offering:

- A customer focussed service
- Generous foster carer allowances and support package
- Transparent, supportive and timely assessment process
- Understanding and supportive supervising social workers who are always 'on the other end of the phone'
- Comprehensive Out of Hours support
- Excellent training
- A mentoring service
- An opportunity to become a recruitment champion
- Being part of our relationship-based (systemic) model of working with vulnerable children and their families

Monitoring and Evaluation

The strategy will be measured quarterly to build up a picture of effective methods of recruitment. This will be undertaken by a variety of methods including:

- Analysis of initial enquiry data – an ongoing monitoring system is in place via framework and other database systems
- Analysis of prospective carer's data – on-going monitoring systems are in place
- Analysis of referrals
- Analysis of exit interviews/feedback to evidence how services can be improved and promoted
- Panel feedback
- Ongoing monitoring systems are in place
- Analysis of 'drop out' stage – when do people drop out of the fostering process i.e. information pack, initial visit, preparation training, or assessment stage
- Evaluation of individual recruitment channels used – including hits to the website and press coverage
- Surveying of newly approved foster carers during 2021

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Escalation Policy for Foster Carers

General Principles of Resolutions

It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the care of the children and young people to 'problem solve'. Communication is extremely important and is the key to resolving misunderstandings or disagreements.

Effective working together depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of carers and Croydon Fostering Service, and a belief in a genuine partnership and joint working to safeguard children. The focus of this protocol is to ensure resolution and the continuation of good partnership working. Everyone should work to the principle of restoring relationships and disagreements at the lowest possible level, ensuring that concerns have been listened to and addressed.

Problem resolution is an integral part of professional cooperation and joint working to safeguard children. Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion. Due to the nature of the work undertaken it is inevitable that there will be disagreements from time to time. Multi-agency/multi-professional debate, difference of opinion and respectful challenge should be encouraged to impact positive outcomes for children and young people.

How to escalate

Step One

Foster carers should make every attempt to resolve the problem via their Supervising Social Worker. It might be necessary for the supervising social worker to seek support from or consult with their manager or other colleagues within Children's Social Care to address the issue and seek a resolution.

The Supervising Social Worker must ensure that a record of the issue raised is recorded on the Foster Carer file (on CRS). The Supervising Social Worker must also record on the Foster Carer file if the issue was resolved and how, or whether the issue will be escalated.

This step should be resolved within 5 working days of matter being raised by Foster Carers (some exceptions might apply and carers and SSW might agree a different timescale).

Step Two

If the issue raised remains unresolved it should be referred/escalated to the Supervising Social Worker's own Team Manager. The Team Manager will want to know what efforts were made to resolve the issue within step one.

It might be necessary for the Team Manager to seek support from or consult with their manager or other colleagues within Children's Social Care to address the issue and seek a resolution. The Team Manager will talk to the Foster carer as part of this resolution process as necessary.

The Team Manager must ensure that a record of the issue raised is recorded on the foster carer file (on CRS). The Team Manager must also record on the foster carer file if the issue was resolved and how, or whether the issue will be escalated.

This step should be resolved within 5 working days.

Step Three

If the issue raised remains unresolved it should be referred/escalated to the Fostering Service Manager. The Fostering Service Manager will want to know what efforts were made to resolve the issue within steps one and two.

It might be necessary for the Fostering Service Manager to seek support from or consult with their Head of Service or other colleagues within children's social care to address the issue and seek a resolution. As necessary the Fostering Service Manager will talk to the Foster carers and communicate any decisions to the carers either verbally or in writing.

The Fostering Service Manager must ensure that a record of the issue raised is recorded on the foster carer file (on CRS); they must also record on the foster carer file if the issue was resolved and how, or whether the issue will be escalated.

This step should be resolved within 5 working days.

Step Four

If the issue raised remains unresolved it should be referred/escalated to the Head of Service with responsibility for Fostering. The Head of Service will want to know what efforts were made to resolve the issue within the previous 3 steps.

It might be necessary for the Head of Service to seek support from or consult with the Director of Children's Social Care or other colleagues within children's social care to address the issue and seek a resolution.

The Head of Service must ensure that a record of the issue raised is recorded on the foster carer file (on CRS); they must also record on the foster carer file if the issue was resolved and how, or whether the issue will be escalated. The decision made will be communicated to the Foster carer verbally or in writing.

This step should be resolved within 5 working days.

Step Five

In the rare circumstances that the issue raised remains unresolved it should be referred/escalated to the Director of Children's Social Care.

NOTE:

The Foster carers can also use Croydon Council Complaints Procedures at any step of this process.

If matters raised are concerning the care of the child or safeguarding issues the carer can also raise the concerns with the child Independent Reviewing Officer.

Effective Escalation

It has been proven to be helpful when trying to resolve disagreements/dispute to remember to:

- Clearly identify your concerns;
- Describe the impact on the child(ren)/young people;
- Set out what the bottom line is to resolve the issue(s) raised;
- Put all of the above in writing and present it in raising the issue;
- Record details of conversations;
- Be responsive to obtaining/providing any additional information requested.

Appropriate escalation

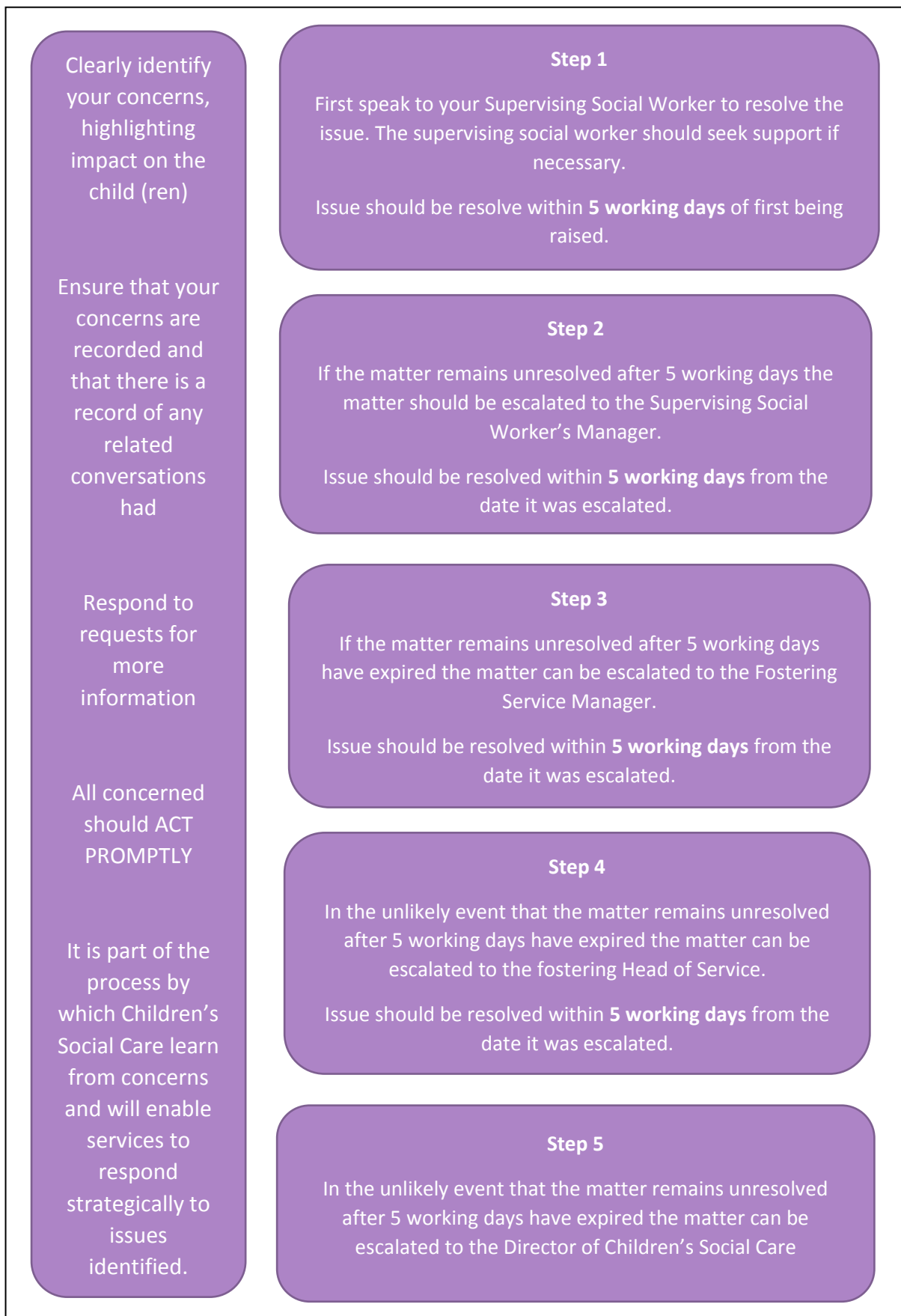
There are time when it might be necessary to present the initial issue directly to the Service Manager, Head of Service, or Director or children's social care. Circumstances where this might be relevant are:

- Where there are immediate safeguarding concerns regarding a child in (your) care;
- If the subject of concern is the Supervising Social Worker or Team Manager then the issue should be presented to Service Manager, and so on.
- Where the concerns are of such a magnitude that the reputation of Croydon Council would be adversely affected.

Flowchart

For ease of reference you will find a flowchart on the next page:

CROYDON FOSTERING ESCALATION PROTOCOL (CFEP) FLOWCHART



Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme 2020/21

Meeting date	Wed 1 July 20 CANCELLED	Tues 29 Sept RESCHEDULED	Wed 11 Nov POSTPONED Held – 24 Nov	Thurs 10 Dec NEW	Wed 13 Jan 21	Wed 3 Mar	Wed 28 Apr
Theme	SUFFICIENCY	EDUCATION	HEALTH	SUFFICIENCY	ADOPTION	CARE LEAVERS	FOSTERING
Item	Terms of Reference	Exam Results Exclusion SEN	Initial Health Assessment and Review Health Assessment Report	Residential Care (Part B paper – Regulation 34) [Move to March?]	Summary of ASL Adoption activity	Care Leavers and Support for Care Leavers	Annual Report of Fostering Service and Panel Statement of Purpose
Officer							
Item	Residential Care (Part B paper – 34 Regulation)	Mentoring and Careers guidance for LAC an CL Mentoring and IV work	Update on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Offer for Children Looked After	Update on the South London Commissioning Programme (Service/Strategy)	Croydon Social Care update on children with a plan for adoption	Leaving Care Offer and pledge	Recruitment and Deregistration
Officer							
Item	Update on the South Commissioning Programme	Engagement Achievement (inc. complaints and leaving opportunities)	CIC Performance Scorecard	IRO Annual Report	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard	Review of Fostering Services Escalation Policy for Foster Carers
Officer							
Item	IRO Annual Report	Annual Report of Virtual School	Annual Report of Corporate Parenting (19/20)	CIC Performance Scorecard	Renewal Plan and the Impact on Children	Missing Children	CIC Performance Scorecard
Officer							
Item	CIC Performance Scorecard	CIC Performance Scorecard		Children's Social Care Placement Sufficiency			Annual Report of Corporate Parenting Panel
Officer							
Item							

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