

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny
Committee - 2 March 2010

Subject: Ofsted Inspection of Manchester Fostering Service
20 – 27 November 2009, and Progress of the Service
Improvement Plan

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report:

To inform committee members of the outcome of the November Ofsted Inspection of Manchester's Fostering Service.

Recommendation:

Members note the outcome of the Fostering inspection, improvements made and progress in implementing changes in the service.

Financial Consequences for the Revenues Budget:

Efficiencies realised through the Service Improvement Programme are factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan for Children's Services for 2010-13.

Financial Consequences for the Revenues Budget:

None

Wards Affected:

All

Contact Officers:

Ciaran Rafferty, Service Lead, Corporate Parenting and Placements

Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

Family Placement Service Improvement Programme. Report to CYPOS 19.5.09

IMPLICATIONS FOR:

Anti-Poverty	Equal Opportunities	Environment	Employment
Yes	Yes	No	No

1. Introduction

- 1.1 An Ofsted key inspection of Manchester Fostering Service took place at the end of November 2009.
- 1.2 As part of the inspection process, inspectors read a selection of carer and children's files, interviewed a number of carers, met with a group of young people who are fostered by Manchester carers and observed the Fostering Panel. They also met with a number of colleagues including our Children's Rights Service, Health and Education colleagues.
A questionnaire was sent by Ofsted to 100 Foster Carers. The inspectors also met with a wide range of staff within the service.

2. Inspection Judgement

- 2.1 The Inspection Report was received in December 2009. The overall Ofsted judgement remains 'Satisfactory'. Within this, however, three specific outcome areas, Enjoy & Achieve, Helping Children to Make a Positive Contribution and Achieving Economic Wellbeing were judged as 'good'.
- 2.2 This reflects an improvement from the 2008 inspection when all specific outcome areas were judged as satisfactory. The outcome of the inspection is consistent with our own self-assessment. The Service has maintained and embedded improvements recognised in the 2008 inspection, whilst implementing significant change in the service structure.
- 2.3 The inspectors noted that *"carers visited as part of the inspection process are providing a good standard of accommodation and support for the young people placed with them. Young people say that they feel safe and happy within their placement"*.

3. Requirements and Recommendations

- 3.1 Ofsted did not make any requirements as a consequence of this inspection. They did however make a number of recommendations, which relate primarily to recording practices, provision of information to foster carers and personnel practices.
A detailed action plan has been drawn up to address all the recommendations made in the inspection report
- 3.2 These recommendations were made in the context of two groups of carers, currently supported by district social work staff
- Family / Friend Carers who are approved on an urgent / immediate basis and who are not formally approved as foster carers. ("Regulation 38 carers")
 - Short term family / friend carers.

Ofsted recognised that the Local Authority is in the process of improving support to these groups of carers as detailed in 3.3 to 3.5 below.

- 3.3 Planned as part of the Fostering Service Improvement Programme, the support of all short-term family / friend carers will transfer to the Fostering Service by the end of March 2010. This will ensure an improved and consistent level of support to this group of carers.

The Fostering Service will also provide input into the district social work assessment of urgent / immediate family / friend carers (Regulation 38 carers).

- 3.4 Relevant to this issue, the Department of Children, Schools and Families has recently issued for consultation draft revised regulations on the assessment of family / friend carers on an urgent / immediate basis. These regulations, if enacted as drafted, allow for a longer period of assessment of urgent / immediate carers. All such carers will have the formal status of foster carers from the start of placement and will have the same rights and responsibilities as any other foster carer.

- 3.5 Changes we are making to the procedure for assessment and support of Regulation 38 and short term family / friend carers will anticipate the application of revised regulations. It is unlikely that revised regulations will be enacted prior to the next inspection, which is due in November 2010.

4. Service Improvement Programme

As planned, a number of changes have been implemented within the Service as part of the Service Improvement Programme.

- The structure of the service has been changed. Support to foster carers is delivered from district-linked teams. This change facilitates closer links with district social work colleagues and multi agency partners
- Assessments have been outsourced. This allows the service to respond quickly to peaks and troughs of demand for assessment and frees up our own staff to provide improved support to foster carers including short-term family/friend carers.
- Discretionary allowances to foster carers are administered by the Fostering Service from 1.2.10. These allowances were previously administered by district social workers. The new arrangements, established in consultation with Manchester Foster Care Association, will ensure that discretionary allowances will be provided in a consistent way and that carers receive all the allowances to which they are entitled.
- Quality assurance and recruitment of carer functions have been brought together in one team.
- A high profile carer recruitment campaign was held in the last 3 months of 2009. This has successfully increased enquiries although it is too early to report on success in terms of new approved carers

- A new Head of Family Placement Services, Joanna Waterhouse, who previously managed services to unaccompanied asylum seekers and currently manages the multi agency Protect Team (work with children who are being sexually exploited) has been appointed. Joanna's track record of successful delivery of services and partnership working will be an asset to the service as we move forward with full implementation and completion of the Service Improvement Plan.

5. Recruitment and progress in increasing numbers of in-house foster carers.

5.1 The changes in structure and the high profile recruitment campaign have resulted in more new carers going through the recruitment and assessment process. Currently there are 32 new carer households going through assessment, all of which are timetabled for the Fostering panel within the next four months. We are still experiencing, however, high numbers of carers who are leaving the service. The table below (5.2) illustrates this

5.2

Termination of approval/resignation of foster carers, from September 2009 to January 2010 (excluding short term family/friend carers)

Reason	Numbers
SGO/RO/adoption granted	7
Child is 18 or no longer in placement	6
complaint/deregistered	2
Resigned due to ill health	2
Resigned due to baby	1
Change of circumstances	4
Retired	6
Total	28

It should be noted that 25% of carers where approval as foster carer ceased continued to care for the child/children placed by way of a non-LAC legal status. In this way carers are fulfilling the child's plan and achieving permanence for the child outside of a looked after status.

5.3 At current rates of recruitment and loss of carers, the net increase of carer numbers per year is 15. This demonstrates progress towards the target of a net growth of 30 carers per year. It is reasonable to expect that retention of carers will improve reflecting improved support from the Service. The following actions are also being taken to improve the net growth in foster care numbers.

- Review of post enquiry processes to ensure maximum conversion from enquiry to approval.
- Recruitment of staff to new structure. This will improve support to carers and improve retention.
- Review of recruitment campaign outcomes in order that future recruitment is productively focused.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Members are asked to note the 'Satisfactory' judgement of the recent Fostering Inspection. Three specific outcome areas have been judged as 'Good' reflecting an improvement in the core Fostering Service from the last inspection in 2008. This has been achieved whilst implementing significant change in the structure of the Service.
- 6.2 A key area for improvement is the assessment and support of "Regulation 38" and short term family / friend carers. The support of all short-term family / friend carers will move to the Fostering Service by the end of March 2010. The Fostering Service will also support district colleagues in the assessment of urgent / immediate family / friend carers.
- 6.3 Recruitment, assessment and approval processes have been improved and an intensive recruitment campaign held. While it is too early to report on final outcomes of this campaign, the campaign has been successful in attracting an increase in enquiries and potential foster carers. Progress is being made in stabilising and increasing the number of Manchester foster carers. The target of a net 30 new carers per year remains challenging given the high numbers of carers leaving the service. One quarter of these carers, however, continue to look after the child/children within a non-looked after status, consistent with the strategic objective that only those children who need to be, should be "looked after".