

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Committee:** Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny - 7 September 2010

**Subject:** Family Placement Service Improvement Update

**Report of:** Director of Children's Services

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**Purpose of the report:**

To provide further update to Committee on progress of the Family Placement Improvement Project

**Recommendations:**

Members note the contents of this report and request a further report in six months or as soon as possible after the next Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service.

**Financial consequences for the revenue budget**

Increased reliance on the external fostering sector is equivalent on current numbers to a net increased expenditure and overspend on the external placement budget of £12,500 per week.

The proposal to review and increase allowances to Manchester Foster Carers will have implications for the revenue budget to be determined.

**Financial consequences for the capital budget**

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**Background documents:**

Reports to CYPOS on developments in the Family Placement Service dated 6 January 2009, 19 May 2009, 2 March 2010.

Draft Statutory Guidance: Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (Commissioning Support Programme)

Bursting at the Seams: The impact on Fostering services of the rise of children going into care 2009-10. Fostering Network August 2010

**Wards affected:**

All

**Implications for:**

Anti-Poverty	Equal Opportunities	Environment	Employment
Yes	Yes	No	Yes

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report is presented further to previous reports dated 19 May 2009 and 2 March 2010 that informed CYPOS of progress and improvements to the Family Placement Service.
- 1.2 The report to CYPOS of 2 March 2010 informed Committee of the outcome of the November 2009 Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service. This demonstrated an improved Ofsted judgement for the second successive year. 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.'*
- 1.3 The report listed improvements made to the service, reported on the high profile carer recruitment campaign and challenges in achieving net growth in the numbers of in-house foster carers. It also advised of intended changes in the assessment of short-term family/friend carers.

**2. Progress since March 2010**

- 2.1 The new structure of the Fostering Service has been embedded. Recruitment of staff has continued to vacant posts and the majority of these have been filled. This has led to increased support to foster carers and improved standards. Placement stability of young people has improved. Current data indicate that our performance in respect of placement moves is better than the English average and that of our "statutory neighbours".

- 2.2 The district-linked structure of the fostering delivery teams has also facilitated improved relationships and joint working between districts and Fostering Service staff. This ensures that children and young people and their carers get an improved and joined up response from Children's Services staff.
- 2.3 A significant point of progress is that all short-term family/friend carers are now supported within the Fostering Service. Prior to April of this year, these carers were supported within the district social work service. This change enhances the support received by this group of carers to that received by any other carer. Every short-term family/friend carer has an allocated supervising social worker in the Fostering Service in the same way as all other Manchester approved foster carers.
- 2.4 Further, from August 2010, the Fostering Service is contributing to the assessment of all urgent and immediate family/friend carers.
- Prior to this date, these assessments were undertaken by district social workers alone. The input of the Fostering Service will improve the quality, timeliness and consistency of these assessments which require presentation to the Fostering Panel within six weeks of placement of a looked after child with a family/friend carer on an urgent/immediate basis.
- 2.5 External funding for the Treatment Fostering scheme has ended. The budget and management of this service is now integrated into the core Fostering service. The Primary Care Trust (PCT) continue to part fund this scheme. Continued funding from the PCT is a risk longer term due to changes in Health funding and the disbandment of PCTs.
- 2.6 The placement team for disabled children, previously managed within the Child Health and Disability Service is also now managed within the core Fostering Service.
- 2.7 Additional to ongoing recruitment of carers, an intensive campaign took place at the end of 2009. While successful in terms of attracting initial enquiries, the conversion rate from enquiry to approval is low, below 3%. An external review of our response and approval systems was undertaken in July 2010 to ensure that we are maximising the potential from these enquiries. This review, whilst making some suggestions for improving our response, concluded that the recruitment team are rigorous and effective in their response to enquiries and conversion rates are comparable to other similar cities.
- 2.7.1 Alongside this recruitment activity and new approvals of foster carers, Manchester continues to lose approved carers.
- An analysis of approvals and termination of approvals in the first seven months of this year, January to July 2010 is presented below and shows that

essentially the total number of Manchester approved carers remained the same over this period:

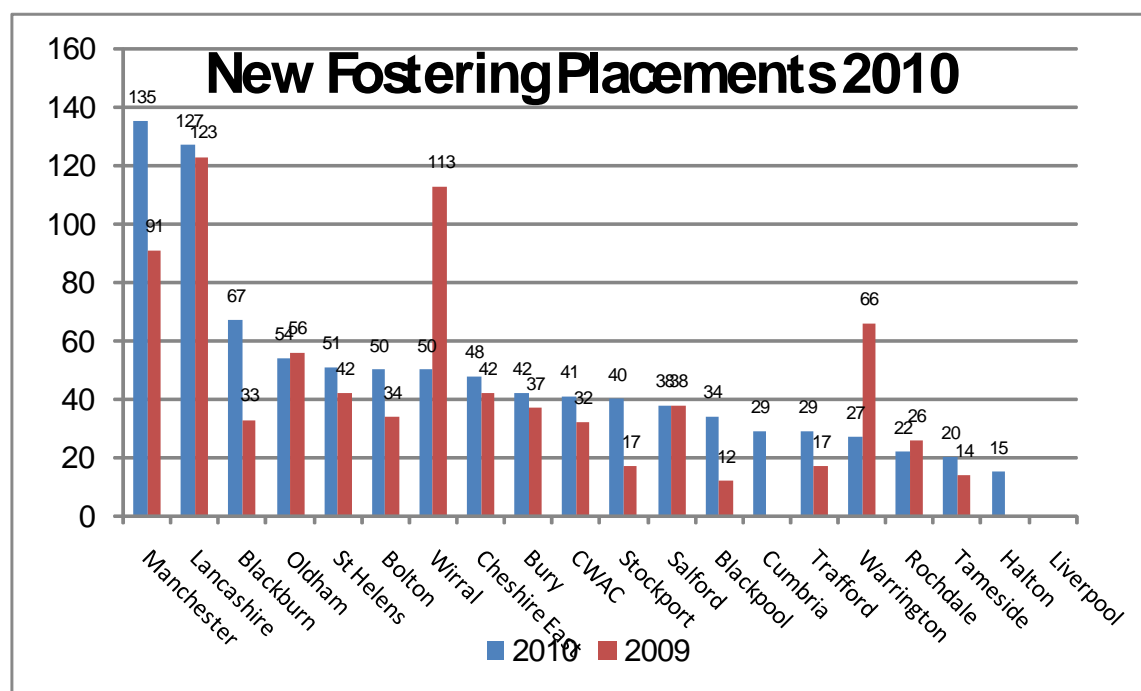
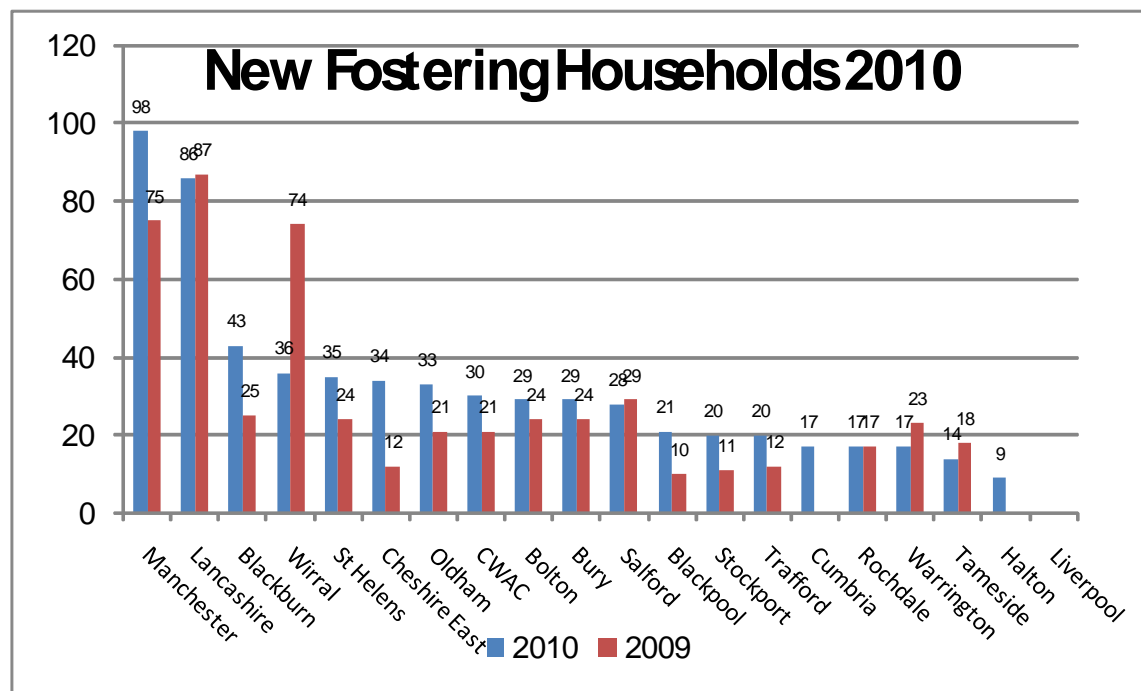
<b><u>January to July 2010 Approvals and Terminations of Approval</u></b>			
	<b>Family / Friend</b>	<b>'Stranger'</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Approval</b>	32	18	50
<b>Termination of Approval</b>	29	20	49

<b><u>Reasons for Termination of Approval</u></b>	
<b>Continuing Care</b>	29
<b>Carer Resignation</b>	17
<b>Agency Decision</b>	3

2.7.2 When a child comes into care, the first priority for placement is with family/friend carers. These figures demonstrate that emphasis, the majority of newly approved carers being family/friend carers.

Figures also show that the majority, almost 60%, of carers leaving the service as foster carers continue to care for a child/young person either beyond 18 years or by way of Special Guardianship or Residence Order. This is consistent with the strategic intent of achieving permanence for children outside of looked after status when appropriate and that only those children who need to be "looked after" should be.

2.7.3 While noting the limited conversion rate from enquiry to approval, a recent report from Placements North West illustrates the relative success of Manchester in recruiting new carers and improved recruitment performance from 2009 to 2010. The figures for Manchester and other North West authorities are presented below.



2.7.4 In 09/10, Manchester approved more foster carers than any other Authority in the region. Despite this, given a parallel loss of foster carers, Manchester and other Local Authorities are not achieving a net increase of in-house carers. The Manchester position mirrors that of the region generally. Despite the recruitment activity demonstrated above, the regional net increase in local authority foster carers was only 10.

## 2.8 Centralised Placement Team

Alongside the redesign of the Fostering Service, we are developing a Centralised Placement Team.

This team will provide one point and process of referral for social workers who need a placement, irrespective of whether the need is fostering, residential care or supported lodgings and whether the placement provided is in house or external to the Local Authority. The team will ensure that the child/young person is provided with the right placement to meet his/her needs while ensuring that the placement also offers value for money. The team will also regularly review the contractual arrangements for the placement so that the cost of the placement continues to accurately reflect the service provision to the young person.

A current intensive review of all external residential placements on this basis has to date identified £156,000 of actual savings and £211,000 savings on reported projections.

### **3. Future Developments**

- 3.1 As indicated above, recruitment and retention of carers remains a challenge. The context within the North West region and nationally is one of increasing demand and competition for foster carers.
- 3.2 Manchester has managed to maintain its looked after children numbers at the 2009 level. Regionally the picture is different. Regional figures indicate an increase in LAC numbers of 739 in the last year. Local authority internal services have not kept pace with this growth, leading to increased use of independent fostering agency placements.
- 3.3 Nationally, there has been an increase in care proceedings of more than a third from 08/09 to 09/10. It is estimated that there is a national shortage of 10,000 foster carers and that two thirds of current carers are approaching retirement.
- 3.4 Given this demand and shortage of foster carers, it is important for Manchester to maximise the numbers of looked after children placed within the city. As well as keeping children close to their families and community, this more easily facilitates a Manchester multi-agency team around the child model. Further, the previous government issued draft statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area – the ‘Sufficiency Duty’ that will require local authorities to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet need in the local area.
- 3.5 To address this challenge the following actions are being taken:
  - Where we need to commission placements in the independent fostering sector, we will commission more of these within the city. Fostering

placements are commissioned within a regional framework favouring providers according to quality and price. We will work with preferred providers to ring fence Manchester placements.

- Local authorities are competing with each other to retain market share of approved carers. This means that collectively, local authorities are not using their combined resources most effectively. We are working with colleagues in the region to implement a regional recruitment campaign for foster carers. This will run from October 2010 to June 2011. Applicants who live within the city will be directed to Manchester's Fostering Service.
- We are meeting with other authorities in the region to explore opportunities to use each other's services and further opportunities for collaboration to maximise placement within the Authority.
- The Fostering Service is exploring with the Director of Communications and her team opportunities to improve and refine recruitment activity and also how the resources of that team can support the retention of foster carers.
- Some authorities have responded to the regional and national shortage of carers by increasing their allowances. Manchester is reviewing its allowances to ensure that we are in a position to at least retain our market share.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 Structural changes and investment in the Fostering Service have been implemented which has resulted in improved standards and support to foster carers. Recent Ofsted inspections reflect this improved position.
- 4.2 These changes have allowed the Fostering Service to assume responsibility for the assessment and support of short-term family /friend carers. This has improved the quality and consistency of assessment and support to this group of carers.
- 4.3 There is a regional shortage and increase in demand for foster carers. The foster care market is as a result increasingly competitive.
- 4.4 Manchester has had some success in recruiting new carers and has recruited more carers than any other authority in the North West. Nevertheless this recruitment has only replaced those carers we have lost. It should be noted, however, that 60% of this loss is positive for the child/young person who continues to be cared for outside of a "looked after" status.

- 4.5 In order to ensure that Manchester retains its market share of foster carers and is in a position to look after more of its children and young people within the city, a number of actions are being taken including:
- improved commissioning practises to maximise placement within the city.
  - collaborative work with other authorities in the region.
  - review of allowances and other retention factors for Manchester carers.