

# TAMESIDE COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE SUFFICIENCY REPORT NOVEMBER 2022

LYNDA CLIFFORD

FOSTERING  
SERVICE  
MANAGER



## **Sufficiency Report for the Fostering Service.**

The intention of this report is to update members on the progress of the fostering Service since becoming Service Unit Manager in April 2022.

Since this time there has been significant changes within the service in regard to both staffing and the implementation of the Foster Care Offer.

### **Staffing:**

In March it was agreed that the SGO/DCO team would move over to the Cared for Childrens Service under the Service Unit Manager, Joanne Brown.

The four Family Intervention Workers also moved from the Fostering Service to sit within Early Help.

These were significant losses to the team and the team experienced a short period of instability. This was further compounded by the Service Unit Manager, Glen Perryman and Panel Advisor, Michelle Leacock leaving the service and moving to another Local Authority.

In July we also lost a Practice Manager, Katy Ellaway to the same Local Authority.

In August two Supervising Social Workers left one for a three month secondment to the Fostering IRO team and one took early retirement.

Although the team knew me and my ethos as Team Manager it was important for me as the new Service Manager to reassure them and the foster carers and offer stability.

I did this by involving the service in the changes – the vacant posts were offered to the fostering team initially to progress their careers but also to reassure them that I was confident they had the skills and ability to promote the service.

The new Team Manager, Deborah Smolka-O'Brien was previously a Practice Manager. The two Practice Managers appointed were from the social work teams, one was previously an agency worker on the team. The Panel Advisor/ Practice Manager post was accepted by a social worker on the Connected Persons Team. They are all new managers and are being supported by Deborah and will be commencing the Strive Programme on the next cohort.

There are currently three full time agency workers and one job share. Since my appointment we have converted three agency workers to permanent and hope the remaining agency workers also stay as they are valued members of the team.

The Marketing and Recruitment Officer had 2 Kickstart workers join her team in January 2022 for 6 months. The 2 workers became valued members of the team and worked hard to support the implementation of the Foster Care Offer and the Staying Put policy. Unfortunately they had to leave us in September following their 6 month placement. This has meant that Gabrielle Sulak, the Marketing officer has had to pick up the projects they started as well as continuing her own work.

Since the appointment of the new Panel Advisor the panels now operate a hybrid model with the panel members remaining virtual and the social workers and applicants coming into the office. This model is working well, the applicants are reassured prior to joining the meeting by their social worker, they feel part of the meeting and feel they have more opportunity to give their views.

Applicants, social workers and panel members feel this model is proving beneficial and improving the smooth running of panel.

There remains difficulties in applicants getting GP appointments for medicals in a timely manner and this can mean that their panel date has to be moved ultimately delaying final court hearings in some cases.

The Panel Advisor has met with the Medical Advisor and GP representative and they have devised a clear model to work to including an escalation policy. It is proposed to send this to all GP practices for consultation and an implementation date. This will be reviewed in 3 months to see if this supports a more efficient running of panel.

The panel chair remains accessible for consultations and contributes to the Quality Assurance meetings. Some positive feedback has been received especially in regard to the fostering social workers knowing their carers and contributing with confidence in panel.

The Panel Advisor has set up regular consultation 'clinics' to support fostering social workers to be prepared for panel and discuss any concerns they may have. There has been little take up of this so this will now be widened to include Childrens Social Workers, ISCAN and Leaving Care.

A Managers Development Day took place in August to devise a clear business plan using the Signs of Safety Model. We looked at each area of the service; Connected Team, Mainstream Team, Business Link and Marketing and Recruitment. Clear timescales for change and measure were also identified.

The Practice Managers also wrote Mission Statements so there was clarity for anyone coming into the service of the team's ethos and a reminder for the teams/ workers when appropriate.

A whole Service Development Day took place early September introducing the business plan but setting work streams to ensure the whole service 'bought into' the plan and were clear of the manager's aims.

This day went really well and positive feedback was received from the social workers stating that they felt involved in the service and that their views were listened to and taken into account.

#### **Foster carers.**

Between July 2022 to the end of September 2022 there were a total of 58 enquiries as per the table below. This averages just under 20 per month. The same period last year there were 118 enquiries due to the response from the USAC campaign. Due to a number of reasons many of these could not be taken forward.

However, the current data shows that conversion through to assessment has improved with eight ongoing assessments at the end of September 2022 compared to 4 ongoing in 2021. The biggest challenge the fostering team are faced with is converting the enquiries into assessments. Some of the reasons for applicants dropping out either before or during assessment include:

- Applicant felt they could no longer apply to foster due to personal circumstances.
- Applicant became uncontactable despite several contact attempts.
- Applicant was undergoing significant life changes and not the right time e.g. new baby, house move, job move.
- Applicants advised/felt they should wait due to age of their own child(ren).
- Applicant concerned about finances.

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>July 2022</b>	<b>August 2022</b>	<b>September 2022</b>
Number of initial enquiries received within each month	14	27	17
Number of Initial Visits	2	4	0
Total number of applications received in month	1	1	1
Number of fostering households actively engaged in a Fostering Assessment on the last day of each reporting month	8	7	8
Total number of households approved by Agency Decision Maker within each month	0	1	0
Total households that have left the fostering service within each month	0	0	2

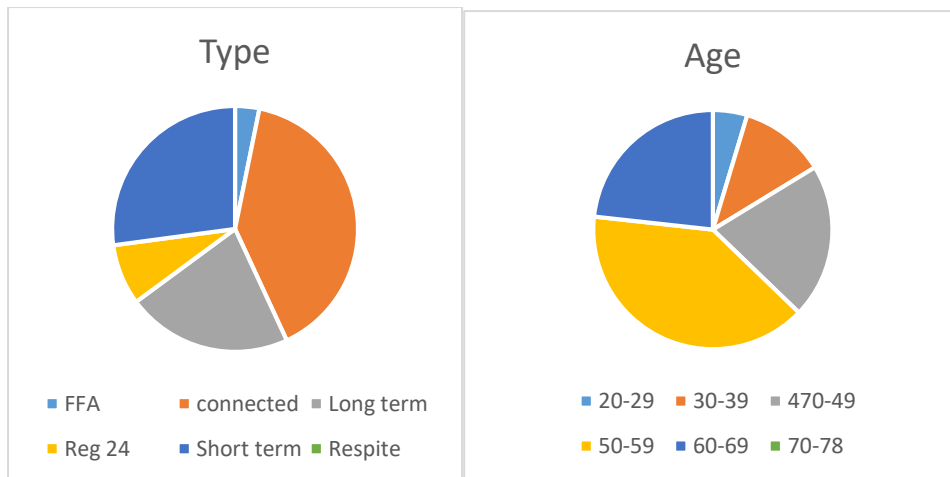
The Marketing and Recruitment Officer continues to work on the 3 year marketing strategy 2021. This sets out to increase the number of children living with internal foster families by 34% which equates to a net growth of approximately 70-80 foster carers over the next three years. The key areas are outlined in Tameside's Sufficiency Strategy 2022-2025.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Sufficiency Strategy has identified "Grow Foster Care" as one of its two Commissioning Themes. As part of this a growth strategy has been developed for GM LAs including collaborative recruitment activity which builds on previous projects

Skills to Foster continues to run bi monthly, we use the virtual platform as this appears to be the preference for applicants and finding venues for the evening groups has not been easy since the relaxation of covid. A recent skills to foster group of 3 households resulted in 3 applications which is positive.

There have been two resignations in the past 3 months due to carers retiring. These carers had been fostering for many years and decided now is the right time for them to cease fostering.

As you can see from the pie chart below there are a large cohort of carers in the 50-59 age category. It is hoped that future campaigns will attract a younger cohort to meet the demanding needs of our most complex children.



There is an increase in Connected Carers who are friends and family carers and are able to provide a safe and caring home for our cared for children. 59% more children are living with connected carers in 2020/2021 compared to 2015/2016. Supporting more connected carers will increase children's opportunities to live within their families in line with Tameside's vision.

The enablers of the strategy for increased internal growth include;

- Working with our GM partners on the GM Fostering Growth Strategy
- Improved Foster Care Offer
- Ambitious Marketing & Recruitment Strategy
- Working with partners in housing, education, health, police and others to support our fostering services.