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**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 6 September 2016

**Subject:** Planning for Permanence

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

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**Summary**

This report sets out our approach to achieving permanence for looked after children and children at risk of becoming looked after. It details the different kinds of permanence for children and provides data about children for whom permanence has been secured in 2015/16.

Where children cannot live with their birth families, our aim is to secure alternative family based care via our adoption and fostering services. This report provides a summary of the activity and impact of the adoption and fostering services in Manchester during 2015/16.

**Recommendations**

That Scrutiny Committee consider and comment on the contents of the report. This is an information report. There are no additional proposals or recommendations made within the report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

None

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 This report seeks to set out our approach to achieving permanence for children in Manchester. By 'permanence', we mean the arrangement in which the child will live permanently throughout his or her childhood and into adulthood.

1.2 The report will detail the different routes to permanence and provide data on children securing permanence through those different routes.

1.3 For children who cannot achieve permanence within their birth families we seek to provide alternative family based care through our adoption and fostering services. The report provides a brief summary of the contents of The Annual Adoption Service Report and the Annual Fostering Service Report, both of which are attached as appendices.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1 Where children cannot live safely with their birth families, the local authority has a legal duty to provide alternative accommodation and care.

2.2 There is thereafter also a legal duty to develop a plan for permanence for all looked after children. All children in care must have a plan for permanence drafted at the time of the second looked after children statutory childcare review, which occurs 4 months after a child first becomes looked after.

2.3 Our adoption and fostering services provide alternative family based care for children who cannot live within their birth families. It is a requirement of adoption service regulations and fostering service regulations that an annual report of the services business and activity is produced and published each year.

## **3.0 Our Approach to Permanence**

3.1 All children are entitled to a sense of security, continuity, commitment, and a sense of identity. In Manchester therefore, we believe that all children have the right to family life which offers them permanence and that where possible this should be within their birth family.

3.2 We define permanence as the securing of a child's legal, physical, social, and psychological wellbeing throughout childhood and into adulthood and understand this is achieved by the provision of consistent care, stable relationships, and a secure family base in life.

3.3 Where children are separated from birth family we will make every effort to reunite them where it is safe to do so and we will give preference to an alternative placement with family or friend where practicable and consistent with the child's welfare.

3.4 Where placement with family cannot be achieved all other options for securing permanence will be considered.

3.5 We recognise the lifetime significance of our permanence decisions and these will be based on detailed assessment, thorough analysis, and decision making at a designated senior level. Such decisions will account for the wishes and feelings of children and young people, their parents and families, and will ensure the child's cultural, religious and racial needs will be addressed.

3.6 We acknowledge the importance of children's links with birth family and will develop contact plans to maintain such links where it is in the child's best interests.

3.7 Our Independent Reviewing Officers quality assure the proposed plan for permanence is in place by the time of the second looked after children review (3 months after children first become looked after by the Council).

## **4.0 Different Types of Permanence**

### **4.1 Supporting Children to Remain with or Return to Birth Family**

4.1.1 In line with the principles set out above, we seek to support children to stay with or return to their birth families wherever it is safe and in their best interests. We have a number of family support and edge of care services that are aimed at supporting children to stay with their families. This includes family group conferences, our early help hubs, the Families First Family Support Team and the Action for Children Multi-Systemic Therapy service.

4.1.2 The Multi-Systemic Therapy service has been particularly successful at supporting parents of adolescents on the edge of care to keep their families together, with 89% of the adolescents they work with avoiding entry to care. In addition Scrutiny Committee members will be aware of the proposal to re-designate one of our children's homes as an 'adolescent support unit', designed to work with and support adolescents on the edge of care to stay with their families.

### **4.2 Adoption**

4.2.1 Adoption is the most legally secure form of alternative permanence in that it removes parental responsibility for the child from the birth parents and places it solely with the adoptive parents. The child becomes legally part of the new family permanently and in every respect legally as if he or she were a birth child.

4.2.2 Adoption is considered for all children who cannot be placed with birth family members.

4.2.3 In total we secured adoption for 87 of Manchester's looked after children in 2015/16, an increase of 20 on the 67 children adopted in 2014/15

### **4.3 Special Guardianship**

4.3.1 Special Guardianship provides legal permanence for children outside of care but not to the same extent as with adoption. A Special Guardian for a child obtains parental responsibility but shares it with the birth parents, although the guardian can exercise greater authority on day to day matters.

4.3.2 We seek to secure Special Guardianship for children who are looked after with connected persons foster carers (kinship/family member foster carers) and those matched long term with 'recruited' stranger foster carers.

4.3.3. In 2015/16 we secured permanence by way of a Special Guardianship Order for 50 of our looked after children. This compares with 34 looked after children made subject to Special Guardianship Orders in 2014/15.

#### **4.4 Child Arrangement Orders**

4.4.1 A Child Arrangement Order gives parental responsibility to a person caring for a child but it is shared with the birth parents. As such it is a legal order that can provide permanence for children in the care of extended family where there are safe and effective working arrangements between parents and carers.

4.4.2. In 2015/16 11 looked after children secured permanence by way of a Child Arrangement Order.

#### **4.5 Foster Care**

4.5.1 In Manchester we recognise the contribution that long term/permanence fostering plays in providing a family base for some children and young people that meets their needs in childhood through to adulthood without the legal security of an order. The plan for long term fostering is based on a thorough assessment of the child's needs and only after permanence through adoption and/or special guardianship has been ruled out.

4.5.2 The decision that permanence through fostering is the preferred option for a child is taken initially through statutory planning and reviewing processes. All proposed long term/permanence fostering placements are presented to the fostering panel and subsequently the Agency Decision Maker for Fostering for consideration and approval.

4.4.3 In 2015/16 there were 24 long term/permanence fostering placements approved via Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker.

### **5. 0 The Annual Adoption Service Report 2015/16**

5.1 The Annual Adoption Service Report 2015/16 is attached as Appendix 1. The following section summarises some of the key details within the report.

5.2 The Adoption Service is made up of two teams. These are the Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Family Finding Team. The Recruitment and Assessment Team recruited and assessed 32 families last year who were approved as suitable prospective adopters for Manchester. The Family Finding Team works alongside children's social workers to find and match adoptive families with our children who need adoption.

5.3 Our Adoption Panel is chaired by an experienced social work professional and there are 19 panel members who take it in turns to attend panel meetings.

5.4 In line with the Government agenda, we have started work to form a new Regional Adoption Agency. We are partners with Stockport, Trafford, Salford, and Cheshire East Councils as well as Adoption Matters and Caritas, two voluntary adoption agencies. The development work is on-going with a view that we will be a regional agency from April 2017.

5.5 A plan that a looked after child should be adopted must be approved by the responsible authority's Agency Decision Maker for Adoption. In Manchester the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption is the Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care. The decision for an adoption plan is known as a SHOBPA – the 'should be placed for adoption' decision. In 2015/16 SHOBPA decisions were made in respect of 59 looked after children. This compares with 78 the previous year.

5.6 Where a court agrees that the plan for the child should be adoption it awards a Placement Order. There were 59 Placement Orders made in 2015/16 compared to 46 the previous year.

5.7. The service placed 73 looked after children with prospective adoptive families in 2015/16.

5.8. In total in 2015/16 87 looked after children were adopted. This compares well to the 67 adopted in 2014/15.

5.9 The percentage of children leaving care via adoption increased from 12% in 2014/15 to 18% in 2015/16.

5.10 The Government measure the performance of all local authorities with regards to how quickly children are moved through care to adoption. Adoption Scorecard Measure 1 looks at the number of days on average it takes for a child to move from first coming into care to placement with adoptive family. Manchester's performance for the 3 years up to end of 2015/16 was 569 days. This compares favourably with a statistical neighbour average of 652 days, a core city average of 611 days and a national average of 593 days. Our average on this measure just for children adopted in 2015/16 was 500 days – a significant improvement on the single year average of 601 days for 2014/15.

5.11 Adoption Scorecard Measure 2 looks at the number of days it takes from the date of the Court granting a Placement Order to the Agency Decision Maker approving a match with an adoptive family. Our 3 year average performance on this measure was 252 days at the end of 2015/16. This compares with a statistical neighbour average of 246, core city average of 224 and a national average of 223. Our average on this measure solely for children adopted in 2015/16 was 196 days, significantly improved on the single year average of 309 days in 2014/15.

5.12 The Fostering to Adopt initiative allows approved adopters to also be temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child. This allows the carers to take care of a child - as foster carers - who they will most likely adopt, before the

court proceedings have finished and before the adoption plan has been endorsed by the Court. This means a child can be placed in its forever family and start attaching much earlier. In 2015/16 we placed 11 children in Fostering to Adopt placements.

## **6.0 The Annual Fostering Service Report**

6.1 The Annual Fostering Service Report is attached as Appendix 2. The following sections summarise some of the key details in the report

6.2 The fostering service in Manchester is made up of five teams as follows:

The Recruitment and Assessment Team,  
The TOPS (treatment foster care for primary school aged children) Team,  
The Connected Person's Assessment Team  
Fostering Supervision Team 1  
Fostering Supervision Team 2.

6.3 As per the Regulations, the service has a fostering panel chaired by a skilled and experienced independent social work professional. The panel considers and makes 'recommendations' about the suitability of foster carer applicants and on the matching of children requiring long term placements.

6.4 In relation to permanence fostering placements, 24 children had plans for permanence with their foster carers approved via the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker for Fostering.

6.5 In total there were 226 recruited mainstream foster carers registered with us at the end of March 2016. There were in addition 137 fully approved 'connected persons' (extended family and friends) foster carers and 28 connected persons foster carers temporarily approved and subject to ongoing assessments.

6.6 In relation to placement numbers, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 there were 196 children placed with Manchester recruited foster carers. In addition there were another 185 children placed with connected persons foster carers (fully approved or temporarily approved). A further 534 children were placed with independent fostering agencies

6.7 The service is now striving hard to grow our foster carer pool so we can reduce the number of independent fostering agency placements. These placements are more expensive than in-house fostering placements and more often not local.

6.8 In total there were 23 new recruited foster carers approved in 2015/16. This compared well to the 16 in the previous year but needs to be built upon in 2016/17. There were also 40 connected persons foster carers recruited and approved in 2015/16.

6.9 Of our recruited foster carer pool, 89 of them are approved to take long term/permanence placements.

6.10 On admissions to foster care, there were 172 new placements made in 2015/16 with our own recruited foster carers. This compares well with 161 made with IFA foster carers.

6.11 The service had an investment from the Council of £1.4 m in the year to fund an improved financial package to our foster carers, in order to support our recruitment and retention work. Recruitment has improved and we have a stretch target to recruit to achieve a net gain of 40 foster carers in 2016/17.

## **7.0 Conclusions**

7.1 In 2015/16 we achieved significant improvements in securing permanence for looked after children. More children were adopted than in the previous year,(87 compared to 67) and more children achieved permanence through being made subject to Special Guardianship Orders (50 compared to 34). In addition, for those children who were adopted, we secured adoption for them significantly more quickly in 2015/16 than for those children adopted in 2014/15.

7.2 There was significant change and development within the Fostering Service in 2015/16. The Council made a significant investment in the Fostering Service of £1.4m in 2015/16 to support essential efforts to recruit and retain foster carers in recognition of the need to grow the service. The investment was used to enhance payments to foster carers and went alongside on-going development and improvement work. We are striving to grow the Fostering Service so that we can provide both short term and permanence foster placements for as many children as possible with our own local authority foster carers.

7.3 We have had some success with recruitment outcomes in fostering increasing, and more children being newly placed with our own foster carers than with independent fostering agency carers.

7.4 In 2016/17 we will continue to strive to secure the best form of permanence for children in as timely a manner as possible. We will need to continue to develop and improve our fostering and adoption services so that we have a sufficient supply of high quality substitute families to meet the needs of children who cannot live with their birth families. Our improvement work and the improved outcomes achieved in 2015/16 are encouraging but we must build upon them. We very much anticipate that more children will be adopted in 2016/17 than in 2015/16, and that children starting their adoption journey now will be moved through it much more quickly than previously. We expect that more children will leave care via Special Guardianship and there will be more children cared for by in-house foster carers, and less cared for by independent fostering agency carers.

## **Appendix 1**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 6 September 2016

**Subject:** Annual Adoption Service Report 2015/16

**Report of:** Paul Dempsey, Head of Service, LAC

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report is an annual report to brief Scrutiny Committee Members on the business and activity within the Council's Adoption Service in 2015/16.

1.2 The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Adoption Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving through 2016/17.

### **2. Introduction**

2.1 Manchester City Council Adoption Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (as amended); Adoption Agency Regulations; the associated Statutory Guidance 2014 and the National Minimum Standards 2014.

2.2 Prior to September 2013, Adoption Agencies were inspected separately by Ofsted. Since then, inspection of adoption work is incorporated into the Single Inspection Framework which includes a graded judgement on adoption.

2.3 The Adoption Service in Manchester is made up of two teams, the Adoption Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Adoption Family Finding Team. The Adoption Service undertakes the recruitment, assessment and approval of applicant adopters, family finds and matches children and approved adoptive parents, supports and supervises adoption placements, and provides adoption support services.

2.4 As per the Regulations, the service has an adoption panel chaired by a skilled and experienced independent social work professional. The panel considers and makes 'recommendations' about the suitability of adopters and on the matching of children requiring adoption with approved adopters.

2.5 The Strategic Lead for Children's Social Care performs the role of Agency Decision Maker for the Adoption Service. The Agency Decision Maker considers and makes 'decisions' on whether or not children should be placed for adoption, and following consideration and recommendation by the Adoption Panel, on the suitability of applicant adopters, and the suitability of a match between a specific child and approved adopters, having considered the Adoption Panel's recommendation in each case.

### **3. Activity in the Adoption Service in 2015/16**



### **3.1 Should be placed for Adoption Decisions**

3.1.1 The decision by a local authority that a looked after child 'should be placed for adoption' (referred to as the SHOBPA decision) is a decision made by the local authority's Agency Decision Maker for Adoption based on the social worker's report, known as the 'Child's Permanence Report', legal and medical advice and any other relevant supporting evidence.

3.1.2 In 2015/16 SHOBPA decisions were made in respect of 59 children. This compares with 78 SHOBPA decisions made in 2014/15 and is therefore a decrease of almost 20 children having adoption plans agreed for them.

3.1.3 In trying to explain the decrease in SHOBPA decisions, investigation of rates of admissions of younger children to care indicates a significant decrease in admissions of children under the age of 12 months, from 75 in 2014/15 to 52 in 2015/16. In addition, admissions of children aged 1 to 4 decreased by 27 from 106 in 2014/15 to 79 in 2015/16. It is suggested here that such a decrease in children aged up to 4 coming into care will have had a significant part to play in the numbers of reduced SHOBPA's in 2015/16 and will have a continuing impact in 2016/17.

### **3.2 Placement Orders**

3.2.1 A Placement Order is an Order made by the Court which endorses a child's plan for adoption (following the SHOBPA decision made by the local authority) and allows for the child to be legally placed with approved adoptive parents.

3.2.2 In 2015/16 Placement Orders were made in respect of 59 children. This compares with the 46 Placement Orders made in 2014/15.

### **3.3 Adopter Approvals**

3.3.1 Individuals or couples who wish to adopt a looked after child must first be 'approved' as 'suitable' to do so. Applicant adopters are assessed by the Adoption Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Adoption Panel makes recommendations on the applicant's suitability, with the Agency Decision Maker making the final decision on suitability.

3.3.2 In 2015/16 32 adoptive families were approved as suitable to adopt by the Adoption Service in Manchester. This compares with 60 in 2014/15.

### **3.4 Matches Approved**

3.4.1 The Adoption Family Finding Team seek to identify the most suitable approved adopters for each child needing adoption. Before a child can be placed with approved adopters the suitability of the match must be considered at the Adoption Panel, with the final decision resting with the Agency Decision Maker.

3.4.2 In 2015/16 the service matched 79 children with adoptive families. This compares with 83 matches in 2014/15.

### **3.5 Children Placed for Adoption**

3.5.1 Once a match between a child and approved adopters had been approved, the service may proceed to legally place that child with those adopters. In 2015/16 73 children were placed for adoption. In 2014/15 79 children were placed.

### **3.6 Children Adopted**

3.6.1 Once a child is placed for adoption, the adopters must wait a minimum ten week period before they can apply to the court for an Adoption Order to legally adopt the child. Once an Adoption Order is granted the adopters obtain full parental responsibility for the child.

3.6.2 In 2015/16 there were 87 looked after children adopted. This is a considerable increase on the 67 children who were adopted in 2014/15 and is a reflection of the increased focus in the service on pursuing and achieving permanence through adoption for all children where it is appropriate.

### **3.7 The Percentage of Children Leaving Care via Adoption**

3.7.1 The 87 looked after children adopted in 2015/16 represents 18% of all looked after children who left care in 2015/16. This is an improved performance compared to the year before where only 12% of children who left care did so via adoption.

## **4. Timeliness of Adoption**

4.1 The service has been striving to achieve adoption for children for whom it is in their best interests in a timely manner. Children should be supported through their journey through care and to their 'forever' adoptive family as quickly as possible so they can benefit from being placed with their adoptive parents at as young an age as possible, enabling the bonding and attachment process to begin as soon as possible.

4.2 The Government recognises the need for timeliness in adoption and has been measuring local authority performance on timeliness with their 'Adoption Scorecard' measures for several years now.

### **4.3 Adoption Scorecard Measure 1**

4.3.1 Adoption Scorecard Measure 1 measures the number of days on average that it takes for children who have been adopted to move from first coming into care to being placed for adoption with adoptive families. The Government target on this measure is 426 days.

4.3.2 Manchester's performance on this measure has improved significantly in 2015/16, as indicated below:

The number of days between a child coming into care and being placed for adoption:

- 3 year average up to end 2015/16 for children adopted = **569 days** (643 days in 2014/15)
- single year average for children adopted in 2015/16 = **500 days** (601 days for 2014/15)
- average for all 53 children placed for adoption but not yet adopted on 31st March 2016 = **472 days**

4.3.3 For comparison we know the 3 year average performance on this measure for comparator groups as follows:

- Statistical neighbour average = 652 days
- Core city average = 611 days
- National average = 593 days

4.3.4 On this measure for children adopted in 2015/16 we moved them from coming into care to placement with adopters on average 101 days quicker than we did for children adopted in 2014/15, a very significant improvement. We can also see that that performance is stronger than that of the comparator groups 3 year average performance up to 2014/15 but it is anticipated that the comparator group performance would have improved somewhat also for 2015/16. We also know that the 500 days achieved for children in 2015/15 is still short of the Government target of 426 days.

4.3.5 Performance on this measure has continued to improve in the first two months of 2016/17. For children adopted in April and May 2016 it took on average 354 days to move from being looked after to placement with adoptive family. This is 146 days quicker than for all children adopted in 2015/16 and some 72 days quicker than the Government target of 426 days.

#### **4.4 Adoption Scorecard Measure 2**

4.4.1 Adoption Scorecard Measure 2 measures the number of days on average it takes for adopted children to move from being made subject to a Placement Order to the having a match with adopted parents agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. The Government target on this measure is 121 days.

4.4.2 Manchester's performance on this measure has improved in 2015/16, as indicated below:

Number of days between a Placement Order and a decision on a match:

- 3 year average for children adopted up to end 2015/16 = **252 days** (258 days for 2014/15)
- single year average for children adopted in 2015/16 = **196 days** (309 days for 2014/15)
- average for all 53 children placed for adoption but not yet adopted on 31st March 2016 = **186 days**

4.4.3 For comparison we have the 3 year average performance on this measure for comparator groups as follows:

- Statistical neighbour average = 246
- Core city average = 224
- National average = 223

4.4.4 On this measure for children adopted in 2015/16 we reduced the number of days it took from Placement Order and decision on a match from 309 days in 2014/15 to 196 days in 2015/16, some 113 days quicker. This is stronger than the comparator group performance for 2014/15 but once again we would expect that performance has improved within comparator groups also for 2015/16. In addition the 196 days is still 75 days short of the 121 day Government target so further improvement is required.

4.4.5 Performance on this measure has continued to improve in the first two months of 2016/17. For children adopted in April and May 2016 it took on average 88 days between the child being made subject to a Placement Order and the Agency Decision Maker agreeing the match with approved adopters. This is 108 days quicker than the average for all children adopted in 2015/16 and 33 days quicker than the Government target of 121 days.

## **5. Family Finding**

5.1 The service has a Family Finding Team made up of one Team Manager, four family finding social workers, and one adoption support social worker. The main role of the team is to identify approved adoptive families that can best meet children's need for adoption. The team has been very successful in 2015/16, finding suitable families for matching with 79 children.

5.2 The service strives to provide as many adoption placements as possible from its own recruited adoptive families, but where there is a shortfall of in-house adopters or a child's needs cannot be met by our own recruited families, the team will strive to find a suitable family in the region and across the whole country through families approved by other local authorities and by voluntary agencies.

5.3 The team no longer practice sequential family finding. This was a practice used by most local authorities whereby a specific period of time would be set to identify an in-house adoptive placement for a child before a search for a placement elsewhere would be approved. This practice led to delay for children. If an in-house family cannot be immediately identified now a search will commence for suitable adopters through a variety of means and across the whole country without delay.

5.4 When placing a child with adopters approved by another local authority or a voluntary adoption agency we are required to pay a fee of £27,000. If another local authority places a child with one of our adoptive families they are required to pay us the £27,000.

5.5 The family finding social workers use a variety of measures to match children to adopters including using the adoption register, and undertaking innovative activity such as attending exchange days, profiling events and activity days.

5.6. Of the 79 children matched for adoption in 2015/16:

- 47 were matched with in-house approved adopters
- 26 were matched with voluntary adoption agency adopters
- 6 were matched with other local authority adopters

5.7 Of the 32 placements we made with non in-house adopters, 27 were funded by the Government Grant for Inter-Agency Placements for placing difficult to place children with other agencies. In total we received funding from this grant of £632,000 in 2015/2016.

## **6. Fostering to Adopt Placements**

6.1 Fostering to Adopt was a Government initiative introduced in 2013 to enable children to be placed with their adoptive parents at as early a stage as possible. This initiative allows approved adopters to be also approved as foster carers, and to care for a child who they will go on to adopt before the Court has agreed the plan of adoption through the granting of a Placement Order. This means in some instances it is possible to place newborn babies with approved adopters at the very start of Court proceedings that may last another six months, under fostering to adopt fostering arrangements. Once the proceedings have finished and the Placement Order is granted the child can be legally placed for adoption with those adopters. Essentially the legal status of the placement changes from a fostering placement to a placement for adoption but with no move or impact on the child, other than the positive effect of having been placed with his/her forever parents right from birth.

6.2 There is some risk for the fostering to adopt families in this process as we can never know for definite what decision a Court will make and if the Court decides against a plan of adoption the adopters will experience the distress of the child leaving their care.

6.3 The service has worked hard in 2015/16 to promote Fostering to Adopt, training adopters and staff and seeking to identify children for whom fostering to Adopt is most appropriate. In total we made 11 Fostering to Adopt placements in 2015/16. This has been very positive for the children and families involved and have contributed to our improved performance on timeliness.

## **7. The Adoption Panel**

### **7.1 Composition of Adoption Panel**

7.1.1 The Adoption Panel is chaired by an independent social work professional experienced and skilled in adoption work.

7.1.2 In 15/16 the central list of panel members was made up of 19 members. The members included two chairs during this period, a vice-chair, 2 medical advisors, 8

Social Workers, 1 Elected Member and 5 independent members. This list includes an adoptive parent and representatives from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Our aim in 2016/17 is to make the panel composition even more reflective of our community through recruiting new members from black and minority ethnic communities and from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community, and to identify and recruit an adopted adult or an adult who has previously experienced being in care.

7.1.3 Panel meetings are also attended by the Agency Advisor to the panel. This person advises panel on professional and agency matters and is not a member of the panel.

## **7.2 Panel Member Training**

7.2.1 It is a legislative requirement that there is at least one training day annually for panel members. Panel member training in 2015/16 included 2 training and development days on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

7.2.2 The training covered the timeliness of adoption, sessions by the Local Authority Senior Solicitor on the current legal framework in adoption, best practice in sibling assessments, and the fostering for adoption process.

## **7.3 Panel Business**

7.3.1 During 2015/2016 the adoption panel considered and recommended 32 approved adopters and recommended 79 children's matches with adopters. (Two of these 79 children did not go on to be placed for adoption with the matched adopters as they withdrew from the match after it was made but before the placement day.)

## **7.4 Quality Assurance of Reports to Panel**

7.4.1 The adoption panel plays a key quality assurance role for the service, providing feedback on the quality of reports it is asked to consider. In assessing and feeding back on the quality of the Child Permanence Reports and Prospective Adopter Reports it receives, the panel award each report a quality rating. An audit of adoption panel reports in 2015/16 has been collated.

7.4.2 For Child Permanence Reports presented to the adoption panel:

- 63 of the 79 Child Permanence Reports presented to panel were given a quality rating by the panel.\*
- 1 was rated outstanding
- 14 were rated good
- 45 were rated requires improvement
- 3 were rated inadequate

\* We will be working to ensure that 100% of reports in 2016/17 are quality assured with a quality rating given

7.4.3 For Prospective Adopter Reports presented to the adoption panel:

- All 32 Prospective Adopter Reports presented to panel were quality assured and given a quality rating
- 3 were rated outstanding
- 24 were rated good
- 1 was rated requires improvement
- 4 were rated inadequate

7.4.4 To improve the quality of assessments in the future a new audit tool has been designed to support managers and workers in completing and signing off assessments. Regular audits will be undertaken by the service to identify themes and learning and the adoption panel feedback will be reviewed on a quarterly basis. Training for social workers on writing Child Permanence Reports and Prospective Adopter Reports will be delivered and the adoption family finding social workers will be supporting children's social workers to draft reports and to navigate their way through the adoption process, especially for newly qualified social workers.

7.4.5 No reports considered inadequate will be accepted for decision making by the adoption panel or the Agency Decision Maker for SHOBPA decisions and significant corrective work will be required before re-presentation.

## **8. Staffing in the Adoption Service**

8.1 The Adoption Service is made up of two teams, the Adoption Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Adoption Family Finding Team. The Recruitment and Assessment Team has one team manager and 8.5 full time equivalent social work posts. The Family Finding Team has one team manager, four full time equivalent family finding social workers one adoption support social worker.

8.2 The two team managers report to the Deputy Head of Service for Adoption who reports to the Head of Service for Looked After Children.

8.3 There has been significant movement and change in 2015/16 in relation to the staffing. A new Head of Service, Fostering and Adoption post was created and recruited to, and the Deputy Head of Service post for Fostering and Adoption has been split, meaning we have a dedicated Deputy Head for Adoption. We recruited a new manager for the Family Finding Team, promoting one of our skilled and experienced senior social workers into the role, and we currently have a new interim manager in place managing the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

8.4 Towards the end of 2015/16 and moving into 2016/17 we have seen a rapid turnover of staff in the Assessment and Recruitment Team but new permanent staff have been appointed and are taking up their posts.

## **9. Adoption Support Services**

9.1 The service has a dedicated adoption support social worker based within the Family Finding Team who undertakes adoption support assessments and co-ordinates, receives, and processes requests from adopters for therapeutic intervention funded by the Government's Adoption Support Fund.

9.2 The service in addition has a commissioned adoption support service currently provided by After Adoption. The contract is worth £185,000 per year and is due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. After Adoption provide a range of services on our behalf including:

- Access to birth records
- Support to birth parents
- Support and direct family work with adoptive families
- Telephone advice to adoptive families
- Support groups and celebration events regularly throughout the year

9.3 The Adoption Psychology Service is a service provided jointly by After Adoption the local CAMHS. This service provides pre and post placement advice and support to families. The work includes:

- Assessment of children with complex needs,
- Attachment workshops,
- Training for adopter preparation groups,
- Consultation to the Family Finding Team
- Direct work with families.
- Parenting groups with children under 3 years of age

9.4 The current contract with After Adoption as indicated above will end at the end of March 2017. It is anticipated that April 2017 will see the start of a new Regional Adoption Agency (see section 10 below) of which Manchester City Council Adoption Service will be a part. With that in mind planning for a new regional adoption support service is now underway.

9.5 Our adoption teams have run two 'Ad0pt' training courses for adoptive parents in 2015/16. The Ad0pt course has been developed from evidence based parenting programmes and was partly funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The course provided support to adopters who had adopted children aged 3 to 8 years old, helping them try out new parenting strategies.

9.6 Moving forward we will look to deliver the Ad0pt programme to more adopters as part of the new Regional Adoption Agency. In the interim Manchester are linking in with Trafford Council Adoption Service Ad0pt training courses with a view to applying to the Adoption Support Fund for any families wishing to attend this course.

## **10. The Regional Adoption Agency**

10.1 In May 2015 the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services. By 2020 all adoption services would need to be delivered on a regional basis. The Government advised that where local authority services did not form or become part of a regional adoption agency by 2020 it would legislate to force them to do so. The rationale from the Government for this was a belief that a smaller number of larger regional agencies would be better placed to deliver an increase in the number of children adopted, to reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted, and to improve post adoption support services to families who have adopted.



10.2 Shortly after the Government initiative, our service linked with four other local authority adoption services and two local voluntary adoption agencies to plan the development of a new regional adoption agency. The agencies coming together in this development are as follows:

Manchester City Council Adoption Service  
Stockport Council Adoption Service  
Salford Council Adoption Service,  
Trafford Council Adoption Service  
Cheshire East Council Adoption Service  
Adoption Matters Voluntary Adoption Agency  
Caritas Voluntary Adoption Agency

10.3 A development plan for the new Regional Adoption Agency was submitted and approved by the DfE over summer 2015. DfE grant funding was awarded and has funded a project team which has been progressing the development work since. The team submitted a further transitional plan to the DfE in April 2016 identifying how we would progress to be a fully functioning regional agency by April 2017. This plan was approved by the DfE and further grant funding of £171,000 was awarded. In addition our project was given 'demonstrator project' status as it was seen as one of five across the country who were further forward and clearer in thinking and development work than other developments.

10.4 Staff and managers from the five local authorities and two voluntary adoption agencies have continued to meet to develop the service and ensure a 'best practice' model is in place to operate fully as one service by April 2017.

## **11. Summary**

11.1 It has been a busy but successful year for the Adoption Service in Manchester. The service, as with the Local Authority Children's Services, began the year on an improvement journey and has moved into 2016/17 significantly further on with that journey but nevertheless with further progress still to be made.

11.2 Most importantly in the year, the service achieved adoption for 20 more children than in 2014/15, and on the two key Adoption Scorecard timeliness measures improved performance by over 100 days.

11.3 The adoption panel had a new chair commence in post in 2015/16. The panel has operated successfully, getting through the necessary business and playing a key quality assurance role. We know that we must strive to improve the quality of Child Permanence Reports presented for SHOBPA decisions and to adoption panel and to ensure consistent quality for all Prospective Adopter Reports.

11.4 The introduction of Fostering to Adopt placements has been very positive for children and adopters and improved our timeliness performance.

11.5 We move into 2016/17 in a strong position to improve further and with a focus also on planning to become a regional agency by April 2017. We are very clear we must not let the regional agency development be a distraction from our work currently

to improve the current service and ensure we continue to improve outcomes for children and adopters in 2016/17 and beyond.

## **12. Improvement and Development for 2016/17 onwards**

12.1 We will continue to strive to improving and develop our service over 2016/17. Adoption has a key role to play within our overall Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy and we have a developing Adoption Service Plan to address required action. Key improvement actions include:

- Recruit more adopters who are able to meet the needs of Manchester children.
- Continue non-sequential family finding for children to ensure the best possible and most timely matches.
- Increase number of fostering for adoption placements.
- Improve the timeliness of the adoption journey for both children and applicant adopters through robust tracking.
- Ensure Adoption Panel membership is representative of Manchester's diverse community.
- Improve the quality of assessment reports going to panel
- Review and revise Adoption Support.
- Use training, supervision, tracking meetings, legal gateway meetings and promotion of adoption and good practice to ensure that social workers appropriately plan for children coming into care and achieving permanence via adoption

## **Appendix 2**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 6 September 2016

**Subject:** Annual Fostering Service Report 2015/16

**Report of:** Rob Finney, Deputy Head of Service, Fostering

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report is an annual report intended to brief Scrutiny Committee Members on the business and activity within the Council's Fostering Service in 2015/16.

1.2 As well as providing data about activity in the service, this report will also detail service developments and improvements that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving through 2016/17.

1.3 The report concludes by indicating action to be taken to address gaps in provision in 2016/17.

### **2. Introduction**

2.1 Manchester City Council Fostering Service operates within the regulatory framework of the Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011, Volume 4 of the Children Act 1989 (as amended in 2013) and the Care Planning, Placement and Care Review Regulations 2010.

2.2 Prior to September 2013, local authority fostering services were inspected separately by Ofsted. Since then, inspection of local authority fostering services work is incorporated into the Single Inspection Framework which takes into account the role of fostering in the wider children's services department. Arguably, this gives fostering less robust oversight than when inspected separately.

2.3 The fostering service in Manchester is made up of five teams as follows:

The Recruitment and Assessment Team,  
The TOPS (treatment foster care for primary school aged children) Team,  
The Connected Person's Assessment Team  
Fostering Supervision Team 1  
Fostering Supervision Team 2.

2.4 As per the Regulations, the service has a fostering panel chaired by a skilled and experienced independent social work professional. The panel considers and makes 'recommendations' about the suitability of foster carer applicants and on the matching of children requiring long term placements.

2.5 The Head of Service for Looked After Children performs the role of Agency Decision Maker for the fostering service. The Agency Decision Maker considers and makes decisions (qualifying determinations) on panel recommendations. The Agency

Decision Maker also has responsibility to agree the continued suitability to foster following a foster carer's annual fostering reviews.

### 3. Activity in the Fostering Service

3.1 It has been a significant year of change and development within the Fostering Service. We have seen the appointment of a new Head of Service and an Interim Deputy Head of Service specifically focussing on fostering has been in post since December to add much need additional capacity. The service has had an investment of £1.4m from the Council to invest in foster carer payments to support our efforts in foster carer recruitment and retention, and there has been a real drive to improve the support and supervision that we provide to existing foster carers.

#### 3.2 Children Placed in Foster Care

3.2.1 Manchester City Council is a large local authority with a disproportionately large, albeit decreasing looked after children population. The looked after children population totalled 1,291 children at the end of 2014/15 and had reduced to 1,237 by the end of 2015/16. From looking at the rate of children per 10,000 in the general population and comparing with statistical neighbours, other core cities, and the national average, we can see that we have a high rate of looked after children. For example, at the end of 2014/15 the average core city rate of looked after children was at 80 per 10,000 of the population, and the national average was 60 per 10,000. This is much lower than the rate for Manchester of 113 per 10,000 at the end of 2014/15. Our rate decreased to 108 per 10,000 as at the end of March 2016 but we are still an outlier. We are aiming to reduce the population further by improving our edge of care services and increasing the number of children for whom we secure timely permanence outside of care through special guardianship and adoption

3.2.2 With such a large number of looked after children to accommodate, it will always be necessary to use a mixed economy of care, utilising foster placement resources in the independent sector to compliment our own in-house foster carer resources. However, there has been and is currently an imbalance in the use of the market compared to the use and availability of in-house fostering resources.

3.2.3 One of the significant issues that Manchester City Council faces is the high number of children and young people that have been placed into Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. As **Table 1** below demonstrates, the ratio of internal/external placements at the end of March 2016 was 376 internal compared to 534 external. (The internal fostering figure includes children placed with recruited foster carers, fully approved connected persons foster carers and temporarily approved connected persons foster carers (TACP.) )This imbalance is problematic because many IFA placements are not local and they are higher cost than in-house placements.

3.2.4 The imbalance has arisen as a result of an insufficiency of in-house recruited foster carers. In order to improve this situation, as indicated above, a significant increase in funding was afforded to the service to improve the fees paid to internal carers. This totalled approximately £1.4m and constituted a significant improvement in our foster carer payment scheme. This took effect in November 2015. This has

generally been received well, although there was some criticism of it being rushed and a small number of carers appeared to be worse off. A review of the finance policy is planned for July 2016. Those carers who were worse off in the process (a small minority) were protected for 12 months up until November 2016.

3.1.5 The improved fees have started to have a positive impact on carer recruitment outcomes since their introduction and it is anticipated that this increase in funding will have a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of foster carers during 2016/17, thereby supporting us to start addressing the imbalance of internal/external placements.

**Table 1 - Number of Children in Foster Placements as at 31.3.16**

<b>Looked After Children by Placement Type</b>				
	<b>12/13</b>	<b>13/14</b>	<b>14/15</b>	<b>March 15/16</b>
<b>Total LAC</b>	1300	1373	1291	1237
<b>IFA placements</b>	541	623	614	534
<b>In-house recruited carer placements</b>	238	233	205	191
<b>In-house connected persons placements</b>	179	169	162	185

3.1.6 While Table 1 above illustrates a significant reduction in the number of IFA placements from 614 in 2014/15 to 534 at the end of 2015/16, the number of in-house recruited carer placements had not increased correspondingly and had actually decreased to 191 from 205 the previous year. So while new carer recruitment had increased in the second half of 2015/16 it has not yet had an impact on the number of placements provided by in-house recruited carers. We expect this to turn around in 2016/17 with more carers in the assessment process being approved at panel and offering placements to our children.\*

**\* At the time of writing we know that this has started to happen with placements with internal recruited foster carers increased from 191 to 210 as at end of August 2016.**

3.1.7 It is also evident from Table 1 that the number of children placed with connected persons foster carers increased considerably from 162 in 2014/15 to 185 at the end of 2015/16.

### **3. 2 Number of Admissions in 2015/16**

3.2.1 Table 2 below shows the number of new placements made with foster carers over 2015/16 broken down by month and broken down by internal and external placements.

**Table 2 – New foster placements/admissions made in 2015/16**

<b>Internal / External Placement Breakdown 15/16</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>
Number of children placed in in-house Foster Care placements	12	9	14	34	15	13	16	14	13	11	21	29
Number of children placed in external Foster Care placements (IFAs)	20	5	12	13	10	9	20	21	12	11	7	11

3.2.2 In total over the year there were 201 new placements made with internal foster carers compared with 151 new placements made with external fostering agencies. This contrasts with the total number of external placements currently being significantly larger than the number of internal placements and is a positive indication that we have started to turn this imbalance around.

### 3.3 Foster Carer Resources in 2015/16

#### 3.3.1 Recruited Stranger Foster Carers

**Table 3 – Total Number of Approved Recruited Stranger Foster Carers**

<b>TOTAL FOSTER CARER RESOURCES 2015/16</b>												
	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>
Number of Recruited Stranger Foster Carers	233	232	232	232	225	227	226	226	226	224	224	226

3.3.2 As we can see from Table 3, the total number of internal recruited foster carers reduced in 2015/16. Whilst we did recruit more new foster carers in 2015/16 than the previous year we also lost a significant number. In 2015/16 we recruited 23 new foster carers but lost 29. All fostering services lose carers during the year to retirement or carers deciding fostering is no longer for them, or that their family circumstances have changed, so we know we need to recruit significantly even to

stay still in terms of carer numbers. However it is not anticipated that we will lose such a high number of foster carers in 2016/17. Many of the foster carers who were de-registered in the year were not and had not been taking child placements, so we lost a number who were not 'productive' in an exercise to ensure our carer register is made up only of carers who can actively provide us with placements. It is envisaged that with a new full year with our improved payment package and an improving service we will recruit more new carers and lose less in 2016/17.

3.3.3 Table 4 below shows the breakdown of our recruited foster carers by approval type. As detailed there are a number of different approval types and carers offering specialist placements such as emergency care, disability or our therapeutic TOPS fostering scheme. The large majority of our recruited carers ,163, are however approved for standard short term or short and long term placements.

**Table 4 – Breakdown of Foster Carer Pool by Approval Type**

	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of short term recruited foster carers	111	110	110	110	107	108	106	104	104	102	101	102
Number of short & Long Term Recruited Foster Carers	64	64	62	62	60	61	62	63	62	61	61	61
Number of Long Term Recruited Foster Carers	28	28	28	28	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	28
Number of Foster to Adopt Foster Carers	0	1	3	3	3	4	4	6	7	9	10	10
Number of Emergency Recruited Foster Carers	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Number of Treatment Foster Carers (TOPS)	9	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	7	7

Number of Short Break Recruited Foster Carers	14	13	13	13	12	11	11	10	10	10	10	10
Number of Multi-link Short Break Recruited Foster Carers	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

### 3.3.4 Connected Persons Foster Carers

**Table 5** below shows the number of connected persons foster carers in the service throughout the year. We have a relatively high ratio of connected persons foster carers, with 165 at the year end having been 170 at the start of the year and at a high of 207 in November 2015. Connected persons foster carers, being carers who have a pre-existing relationship with the child they foster, are in the large majority of cases extended family members. Whilst we seek to promote children living with their extended family we want this to be outside of care where safe and appropriate and so are striving to support connected persons carers to take up Special Guardianship Orders on the children. We have had some success and further progress will see connected persons foster carer numbers continue to fall.

**Table 5 – Connected Persons Foster Carers**

	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of Connected Person Foster Carers	145	142	143	149	144	147	153	156	157	141	139	137
Number of Temporary Approved Foster Cares (TACP)	25	27	33	38	39	44	49	51	49	32	28	28

### 3.3.5 New Recruited Carers Approved in 2015/16

Table 6 shows the number of new recruited carers approved each month throughout 2015/16. We can see that there were 8 new carers approved in the first 6 months of the year up to end of September and 15 approved in the second half of the year, after we had introduced our new payment scheme.



**Table 6 – Number of New Recruited Carers Approved by Month in 15/16**

	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of recruited Assessments presented at Fostering Panel recommended	0	2	1	4	0	1	1	2	3	0	2	7

3.3.6 In 2015/16 23 new carers were approved at panel and the year before the figure was 16.

**\*In the first quarter of the new financial year 2016/17 10 carers have already been approved with a further 13 currently in assessment. This puts the service on track to recruit an additional 40 new recruited carers this financial year but our stretch target is to recruit 60 so we will need to accelerate.**

#### 4. Fostering Panel

##### 4.1 Panel Functions

4.1.1 Fostering Services Regulation 23(1) states that *“the fostering service must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel (“the central list”), including one or more social workers who have at least three years’ relevant post-qualifying experience”*.

4.1.2 Regulation 23(4) states that *“...the fostering service must constitute one or more fostering panels, as necessary, to perform the functions of a fostering panel under these Regulations, and must appoint panel members including:*

*(i) a person to chair the panel who, in the case of any appointment made after 1st October 2011, must be independent of the fostering service provider, and;*

*(ii) one or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the panel is absent or that office is vacant (“the vice chairs”) from the persons on the central list.*

4.1.3 Manchester City Council Foster Panel has the following primary functions (under Regulation 25(1) of the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the amendments to Volume 4 of the Children Act 1989: Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers’ 2013 and the Care Planning and Fostering Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2015 ):

- It is to consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent (including “connected

persons"under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement & Care Review Regulations 2010)

- Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given
- It is to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate - (i) on the first review and (ii) on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service (e.g. following allegations or complaints against foster carers)
- It matches children who have a plan for long-term fostering with suitable foster carers

#### **4.2 Panel Member Composition, Training and Review**

4.2.1 The paperwork submitted to panel is always shared seven days before panel meets to comply with National Minimum Standards. Panel minutes are completed on a weekly basis and available for the Agency Decision Maker in a timely manner.

4.2.2 The Panel maintains a comfortable number on a central list which currently includes 12 people. Each panel member who had served for a year had an annual appraisal with further appraisals planned for August/September 2016. The Panel membership includes members with a range of professional backgrounds and interests including social workers, foster carers, and adopter, nursing, a retired police officer and an Elected Member. Each member has many years' experience of public service and fostering in particular.

4.2.3 A specific training event is held annually, and in 2015 this was undertaken with representatives of the fostering service in attendance. The training day is used to focus on a general issue for development, e.g. foetal alcohol syndrome, advanced attachment, and permanence, alongside the opportunity to discuss key developments within the service and the role for panel in supporting these. In addition, the Panel Chair regularly ensures panel members are updated on changes in legislation, statutory guidance and learning from national reviews.

4.2.4 The panel is supported well by legal services as and when necessary. The panel and its members continue to be committed to fostering and specifically to Manchester. The panel is highly motivated to offer support and challenge by appropriately maintaining the role of 'critical friend' to the Department with equal emphasis on both aspects. Where appropriate the panel will offer flexibility without compromising standards.

4.2.5 An annual Director appraisal of the panel was undertaken in February 2016. The feedback from the Interim Director was that panel was working well.

4.2.6 The Panel is keen to recruit further members who can bring specific aspects of diversity. This includes increasing representation from the black and minority ethnic

community, increasing the number of males and recruiting an adult with experience of being looked after.

#### 4.3 Panel Business 2015/16

**4.3.1 Table 7 shows the number of different kinds of cases considered by the Fostering Panel in 2015/16. One thing of note is the high number of connected persons assessments considered at panel. This is especially striking when comparing the 40 connected persons assessments with the 23 recruited foster carers approved at panel.**

**Table 7 – Panel Business in 2015/16**

<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Statistics</b>
Recruited carer assessment	23
Connected Carer Assessment	40
Foster carer review	56
Change of approval category	15
Deregistration (including resignations / retirements and end of connected carer placements.	52
Long Term Matching (In House)	15
Long Term Matching (IFA)	9
Allegations Report	0
Other QA matters	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>

#### 4.4 Fostering Panel and Quality Assurance Role

4.4.1 The feedback from panel members is that generally speaking the quality of the assessments presented has significantly improved, both in terms of recruited and connected carers. The vast majority of assessments in the latter part of the year were rated as good or outstanding by panel.

4.4.2 Panel were reporting a wider variety of quality in relation to both 1<sup>st</sup> annual reviews and long term matching of children. In terms of first annual reviews whilst there was very good quality of support often visible this was not robust and consistent enough and the lack of compliance in the service could be seen through the challenge from the IRO service at the reviews. The IRO service independently chair foster carers annual reviews. This also evidenced a lack of management grip in the support teams which was showing improvement by the year end. The long term matches for children in foster placements somewhat stalled in the year as for some time no SSW was specifically looking at these. As this work was allocated in January 2016 this activity started to increase. It is clear however that the long term matching reports and child's permanence reports need to be very effectively quality assured prior to panel as these regularly need more in depth analysis. This is a key feature for quality assurance leading into 2016/2017.

4.4.3 A key challenge moving into the new year will be to stabilise the role of the panel advisor and to make a permanent appointment to this role.

## 5. Staffing in the Fostering Service

5.1 The breakdown of the fostering teams is:

<b>Recruitment and Assessment Team</b>	
Team manager	Permanently manager in post
Social Workers	2 x AP 5 x SSW
Other staff	1 fte recruitment support officer, 1 fte communications officer, 1 fte Micare support officer

<b>TOPS</b>	
Team manager	Permanent manager in post
Social Workers	.8 fte x SSW, .5 fte training officer, .5 fte AP
Other staff	.5 fte Lead Skills Coach, .5 fte skills coach, 1 fte skills coach support worker

<b>Connected Person Assessment Team</b>	
Team manager	Permanent manager in post
Social Workers	2 fte AP, 7 fte SSW
Other staff	n/a

<b>Supervision Team 1</b>	
Team manager	Agency manager in post
Social Workers	2 x fte AP, 7 x fte SSW
Other staff	6 x fte Foster Care support workers

<b>Supervision Team 2</b>	
Team manager	Agency manager in post
Social Workers	1 x fte AP, 11 x fte SSW
Other staff	3 x fte Foster Care Support Workers

## 6. Fostering Recruitment Activity and Outcomes

6.1 The service enjoys an excellent relationship with the Communications Team and employs it's own communications officer. In this financial year the recruitment material was rebranded to great effect. The advertisements calling for members of the public were very visible around Manchester.

6.2 This improved marketing, and the investment in carer fees from the latter part of the year showed an increase in the number of carers being assessed rising from 14 at the beginning of the year to 23 at the end. This also included 12 carers from IFA's who chose to come to Manchester, many of them already with Manchester children in place. 8 carers were approved in the first half of the year and 15 in the second half. In the first quarter of the new financial year 10 carers have already been approved.

**Table 8 – Recruitment Outcomes in 2015/16**

<b>FOSTERING RECRUITMENT 15/16</b>	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of enquiries regarding Fostering	36	32	70	33	40	43	28	61	37	61	44	37
Number of Initial Visits to Prospective recruited Foster Carers homes	6	1	6	10	10	12	9	6	3	9	9	8
Members of the Public contacting us due to Other Sources/Agency Transfer	2	0	8	6	12	7	10	3	2	7	8	12
Number of Skills to Fostering courses delivered (STF)	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
Number of People who attended training	6	6	5	0	5	9	0	7	0	7	10	0
Number of prospective recruited foster carer assessments allocated	0	2	1	2	2	3	6	5	3	5	4	4
Number of ongoing prospective recruited foster carer assessments	14	15	16	12	16	21	21	22	19	21	22	23
Number of applicants in assessment from other organisations	0	0	0	1	1	4	4	5	7	11	12	12
Number of recruited Assessments presented to the Fostering Panel	0	2	1	4	0	1	1	2	3	0	2	7

Number of recruited Assessments presented at Fostering Panel recommended	0	2	1	4	0	1	1	2	3	0	2	7
Number of recruited Assessments presented at Fostering Panel Not recommended	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Recruited foster carers deregistered	1	4	2	0	10	0	1	4	4	6	1	1

## 7. Fostering Supervision and Support

7.1 This is an area that required significant improvement work over the year, and such improvement work was beginning to take effect towards the end of 2015/16. The quality in the service was found to be less than we would want for our children and our foster carers and additional management capacity was brought in for the whole service, starting with an Interim Deputy Head of the Fostering Service to split the management of the adoption and fostering services. The Interim Deputy commenced work in December 2015.

7.2 A full review and assessment of the service as a whole based on the Ofsted grade descriptors for a 'good' fostering service was undertaken in the latter part of the year and this has led to a full development plan which will be carried through out 2016/2017.

7.3 Reviews of the whole of the service began in January 2016 but in particular the TOPS (Treatment Foster Care Oregon.) The TOPS TFCO Prevention Programme currently offers short term therapeutic foster placements (9-12 months) for 7-10 children age 3-6 years old with complex behavioural, emotional, and social needs. These children are at high risk of failing to achieve permanence in a family setting and remaining in unstable care settings throughout their childhood. Most of the children referred to the programme have had between two and four failed placements prior to admittance to the programme.

7.4 In 2013/2014, the projected cost per child for the intervention service, which is budgeted through the TOPS Programme, was:£1320.00 per week and this only provided placements for 8 children. The aim is to continue to review this service and to disestablish TOPS to replace it with a therapeutic fostering service rather than a treatment programme. This has the dual advantage

of providing a wider variety of specialist placements and at a reduced unit cost. Work on this will be ongoing in the new financial year.

7.5 Reviews of both the Emergency Duty fostering service and the short breaks for children with disability service were started at the end of the year. This was prompted by a recognition that the unit costs in both services had significantly increased due to the underutilisation of the services. This is ongoing in the new financial year.

### **Foster Carer Support Groups**

7.7 There is a well established system for support groups for foster carers. North Support group takes place at Manchester Velodrome every last Thursday in the month 10.00am - 12.00pm and there has been ten groups over the year. South support group runs monthly and there has been 11 over the year. The children with disabilities support group met 8 times over the year. Central support group runs from Chorlton Library and has met 10 times. There is often a guest speaker at support groups and Manchester Foster Carer Association also attend each one to act as advocates for the carers. The groups provide a good for foster carers to network or 'buddy up' for advice and support. Evening groups are also held quarterly. A Baby and Toddler Carer Support Group is also run quarterly. Main support groups had an average attendance of 15 carers.

### **Celebration Events**

7.8 In addition to support groups two major social events were held in 2015/16. One was the annual fostering awards which was held in February 2016 at the Irish Centre in Cheetham Hill. Over 100 carers were in attendance with many receiving achievement and long service awards. There was also a Looked After Children's party held in January at the Youth Zone in Harpurhey. This was very well attended by carers and the young people they look after with age ranges from babies to teenagers. The whole centre was hired for the afternoon so that lots of activities were on offer.

## **8. Looked After Children Placement Information 2015/16**

8.1 Children's Social Care Services in Manchester are currently on an improvement journey. In relation to looked after children, we know that our looked after population is too high, that we have not, up to very recently, been achieving permanence for children outside of care in sufficient numbers and in a timely manner. This has contributed to the Council having insufficient capacity in our in-house fostering service and there is not an adequate range of care leaver accommodation

8.2. Currently, as at March 2016, the looked after population has reduced to 1,236. This is as a result of increased numbers of children being supported to stay with or return to their families through a range of support services and more children being moved more quickly to permanence outside of care through adoption or special guardianship

8.3 Whilst we have made progress over the last year, we have too many children placed out of the city, too many children placed in residential care, and we have an over reliance on independent fostering agency carers to meet our placement needs.

8.4 For the vast majority of children in care their needs will be best met in a family placement that is local to their home community. A lack of sufficiency in in-house foster placements has resulted in many children being placed outside of the city in high cost independent fostering or independent residential care. The LAC Sufficiency Strategy written in March 2016 seeks to address this. The current cost of an in house fostering placement is £499.00 compared to an IFA average of £748.00.

## **9. Service Developments in 2015/16**

- Increased management capacity
- A better knowledge of the service and better management oversight
- Much more effective marketing and more effective assessment processes leading to an increase in recruitment activity and positive outcomes.
- A clear assessment of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the service and associated action plan.

## **10. Service Development for 2016/17**

- Reviews of TOPS, Emergency Out of Hours Carers and multi link disability schemes
- Continued QA work to ensure better management knowledge and grip on the service, all reporting to the performance data group
- Review and improve the way the duty system operates to ensure that we fully utilise all Manchester carers and use less IFA's.
- Upgrade the IT system from Micare to Mosaic and utilise more accurate business reports.
- Significantly increase the in-house foster placements whilst increasing the carer / placement ratio
- Improve carer communication including using a robust questionnaire
- Account for the views of looked after children and foster carers to improve the overall effectiveness of the service

## **11. Summary**

11.1 Whilst this was a challenging year for the service which saw some significant failings it became clear by the end of the year that the service has great capacity to change for the better. Cultural as well as structural change is required to ensure that the service operates in a more business like way that meets the needs of carers, who in turn meet the needs of the children and young people they have placed with them.

11.2 In the coming year there will be significant changes in the way that the service operates. We anticipate one of the most rewarding aspects of this change will be the growth in the service. Significant growth of the service would reduce the amount that IFA's operate in the city, reducing the cost to the city and most importantly ensuring Manchester children are cared for in Manchester.