

# Manchester Fostering

## Recruitment & Retention Strategy 2023/25



**Fostering  
Friendly**

The Fostering Network



**MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL**

## Foreword

In Manchester, we are proud of all children and young people and none more so than 'Our' Children who we 'look after'.

Manchester's Children and Young People Plan sets out our priorities and ambitions for all children and together we are passionate about children living in safe, supportive and loving families; especially for those who for whatever reason are not able to live within their birth family. This is why Manchester City Council places children and young people at the heart of its vision and planning. Our aim is to ensure that 'Our' Children will have the right home, in the right place, at the right time and with the right support and care; put simply a *'safe, supportive and loving family'*.

We can only achieve and deliver on our ambitions by working together as colleagues and communities to ensure that our children and young people are afforded foster homes and carers that are understanding and reflective of them and their community. Our ambition is for all of 'our' children to live within a family arrangement who need one and their needs to be met by carers who feel and are supported to provide the best possible care.

We recognise the current strengths in our fostering service and the hard work and dedication of our foster carers. We know that family-based care is the best possible alternative for the majority of children and young people who cannot remain within their birth families. We want to support and retain our current foster carers as they play a critical role in ensuring 'our' children grow up and experience a happy, healthy and successful future. This is why we remain committed to recruiting more foster carers who are resilient, loving, understanding and most of all see the potential in all of 'our' children; committed to working with us to help them be their very best.

This updated Fostering Recruitment Strategy promotes carer recruitment to be everybody's business; taking collective responsibility to raise the profile of Fostering, the fabulous work carers do and associated satisfaction in our workplaces and communities. As we implement this strategy, we ask that you come alongside us to help us build a safe, healthy, happy and successful future for 'our' children.

**Paul Marshall**

Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

June 2023

## Introduction

This document sets out Manchester City Council Fostering Service's approach to the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers for 2023/25.

According to the Fostering Network, every 20 minutes another child comes into care needing a foster family in the UK. And every day there are about 65,000 children living with 55,000 foster families. This is a nationwide issue and Manchester City Council continue to try and meet the needs of their looked after population ensuring that they have safety, stability and loving homes within the looked after system.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team, alongside the Fostering Team, are responsible for all fostering services including recruiting, assessing, training, and supporting Manchester's newly approved carers and finding suitable, stable placements for our children to promote their well-being and safety whilst helping them to remain within their own communities.

We are focussed on ensuring the best outcomes for our children and their carers and are committed to ensuring that our children live with approved Manchester Foster Carers where their holistic needs can be best met, and they develop trusted relationships with adults who love and care for them.

This strategy sets out our commitment to ensure that:

- Fostering is accessible to all. There is a foster carer available for every child and young person in Manchester that needs one.
- Manchester City Council and organisations that provide services with and to the Council are Fostering Friendly Employers.

## Our Pledge for Our Children

Our promise is to respect Our Children as individuals, regardless of religious belief, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity or disability, and support them on their journey to be resilient and confident people in their own right.

## Being a Fostering Friendly Employer

The Fostering Network have now awarded Manchester with Fostering Friendly status. Alongside the special leave policy, we have seen the introduction of the paid special leave policy. It is envisaged that this status will encourage Manchester employees to consider fostering children and young people. Being a supportive and flexible employer will enable our foster carers to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Being a Fostering Friendly employer will:

- Recognise the needs of foster carers in employment policies
- Hold recruitment events in your workplace
- Sponsor promotion materials
- Help us celebrate fostering and foster carers

Our aim is that employers consider the needs of foster carers and do what they can to help. Be that giving time off for training, allowing swapping of shifts or sharing information on foster caring. In recognition of the support Manchester will help raise the profile of business's commitment to our children at events and in council publications.

Fostering Friendly employers also help promote Foster Care Fortnight, the Fostering Networks annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering and encourage people to consider becoming foster carers and offer children the care they need.

## Benefits for employers

Now we are approved, we can display the Fostering Friendly logo with pride. We are encouraging our colleagues across the Directorate to share this status on their email signatures to spread the word.

- The Fostering Network publish a list of Fostering Friendly employers and will help promote and celebrate Manchester's new status
- Fostering Friendly employers improve support for staff, making workplaces friendlier for foster carers, benefiting the children in their care and also making it easier for people to consider fostering.
- Manchester will share in the celebration of foster care and the vital role it has in transforming children's lives.



**Wayne Perry, Team Manager,**

**Fostering Team**

*"I would always encourage people to think about fostering. It has been one of the greatest pleasures of my life, welcoming children into my family and watching them grow and flourish. I am proud that I now work for a Fostering Friendly Employer who values what I do and supports me to continue in this role."*

It is hoped that like Wayne's own journey that staff are encouraged to fulfil their ambition to foster alongside their working roles both within the Council and partner agencies. Similarly, to Wayne, through the implementation of the Fostering Friendly status carers can receive the support from their employer allowing them to balance employment alongside supporting the needs of looked after children. Regardless of an individual's fostering experience the Fostering Friendly HR policy supports them to have flexible working and paid time off to attend training and supporting a child to settle in their home.

**It is our ambition to recruit at least 5 new carers each year from Manchester City Council through the promotion of our new status and Fostering Friendly Policy.**



## Our Manchester Offer

Manchester is a large, busy and diverse city. Our foster carers and our team adhere to Our Manchester values in everything they do. We are able to offer:

- Lots of different types of fostering, out of hours, short breaks, short-term, long-term permanence.
- Support and supervision by a suitably qualified Social Worker. This supervision is reflective and follows the 'Secure Base' model which provides a positive framework for therapeutic caregiving which helps infants, children and young people to move towards greater security and builds resilience.
- Our foster carers who are caring for children and young people with Learning Disabilities and/or Autism have access to wrap around support including a 24-hour telephone service.
- Foster carer forums (communicating and listening to what carers want).
- Foster carer handbook.
- Max card to access discounted activities.
- Regular monthly newsletter updating foster carers on staffing, events, and updates on fostering.
- Leisure pass for gyms around the city.
- Support groups across the city - day and evening.
- Independent support; including tax advice; free legal advice and a discounted service; training, along with a regular newsletter from Foster Talk.
- Extensive training programme covering a wide range of areas, with a range of levels, including e-learning and face to face.
- Skills and development are recognised and remunerated. As our carers gain skills and experience, they are able to progress from Band 1 to Band 2 and receive a higher skills payment fee.
- Initial clothing, equipment, mileage payments, prom payments.
- An annual award ceremony for our foster carers celebrating their achievements.
- Access to becoming a Foster Carer Ambassador for MCC.
- Annual Christmas Party for (cared for) children and carers and their birth children.
- Planned activities and events throughout the year for children, carers and birth children to be involved in.
- Member of New Family Social for LGBT foster families.
- If transferring from an Independent Fostering Agency, we will match the finance package for current children living with you.
- Timely, skilful professional assessments - we get fantastic feedback on the process.
- Regular skills to foster preparation courses supporting prospective carers to find out more about fostering.
- A transparent and competitive payment structure and progression opportunities included in the finance policy.
- In response to the increased cost of living our allowances were increased by a minimum of 10% for all foster carers in Manchester.
- Mentoring scheme for new foster carers provided by experienced MCC carers. Experienced foster carers who are allocated to newly approved carers to assist them when they welcome their first child to their home.
- Satisfaction Surveys.
- Opportunity to earn £500 for 'tell a friend' referrals to foster.



## Our USP

Manchester is a dynamic and creative city that draws on its distinctive strengths in science, culture, music, and digital business. Manchester City Council within that is a strong brand that stretches across the city. It is trusted, recognisable and reliable.

We have a digital-first approach to our marketing, using the full range of communications, including paid-for advertising, organic content, city centre outdoor media, PR, and events to engage the local community. We concentrate our efforts on increasing contact with and responses from people who have the skills to foster now.

Our fostering service and wider directorate employ diversely experienced staff with years of childcare expertise.

We are seen as the organisation to collaborate with and learn from. Manchester is now amongst the top performing local authorities for services to children in the Northwest after being officially rated Good by Ofsted. The rating follows a full inspection which was completed in March 2021 by Ofsted of the services provided by the city council to its children and young people and is the first time the city has been rated Good since the body first started inspecting local authority services.

## Competitiveness

Our Manchester offer, together with our financial remuneration and package of support, is competitive with other local authorities and the private sector across Greater Manchester. We are also active participants in the GM region and joint working through GMCA around recruitment, engagement and retention of foster carers. Through this work we are seeing creativity in recruitment and retention of our carers and valuable learning from across the GM Local Authorities. There is also a timetable of work and engagement workstreams which we are participating in, and momentum continues to build in respect of this through marketing campaign initiatives and a combined approach to pool resources.

## Mission

To meet the needs of the wide range of local children that need foster families, it is vital that we recruit new, local foster carers from in and around Manchester. This is to ensure that we have the variety of foster carers that we need, who can provide long and short-term care and additionally, short break, multi-link, children with disabilities; children involved in the youth justice system and emergency carers.

Our vision for all children and young people is that Manchester is a great place to grow up, where children and young people are protected from harm and supported to be the best they can be in life. This Strategy feeds into the Children and Young People's plan, which is a wider strategy that promotes joint working with universal services our Inclusion Strategy and our Sufficiency Strategy.

Whilst it is acknowledged that most children and young people are best brought up with their own family, where it is not possible to do so, Manchester will find a carer who best meets their needs. Ensuring that there is a timely option to achieve permanence for all children and young people to have a safe place to live and thrive.

To encourage people who have life skills that make them resilient to use their life experience to become foster carers.



## Aims and Objectives

- To encourage people who already have experience of fostering to foster for Manchester.
- To encourage people who have experience of, and like working with children, to become foster carers.
- To encourage people who have life skills that make them resilient to use their life experience to become foster carers.
- To increase the sufficiency of in-house placements and reduce the usage of independent fostering agencies and residential care.
- To increase the number of foster carers who want to care for children over ten years old.
- To retain our existing foster carers.
- To ensure Our Children have foster families which help them retain their culture and Identity and remain within their communities.
- To help Our Children build positive and trusted relationships with adults and help them to achieve permanence, security and love.

## Where are we now?

During the last two years, the range of foster carer approvals has declined and whilst we have increased capacity in undertaking assessments within a sufficient timescale this has still not been sufficient for Our Children. Within the last year due to the current financial climate there have been further challenges. We have experienced a further decline in people enquiring to foster.

This has resulted in the Service and the Recruitment and Assessment team finding alternative methods to recruit and the selection process being more flexible than in previous years. We have been flexible in terms of approving people that work full-time or who don't drive which are just a few examples of applicants that in previous years would have been ruled out at the initial enquiry stage.

Recruitment of Foster Carers continues to be a vulnerability in the service. This dip in recruitment is experienced locally and nationally. An Ofsted report published in November 2021 identified that: "Since 2014 the number of foster carers has increased by just 4% while the number of children in foster care has increased by 11%. As the number of children in care continues to grow, matching them with the right carers becomes increasingly difficult." Whilst initial enquiries in to fostering continue to rise, conversion rates of enquiries to applications remain a concern and currently;

*"The conversion rate of enquiries to applications in England is at the lowest level on record, 16:1. This marks a continuation of a steady decline since 2014 to 2015, when the ratio was around 8:1.*

*Applications have decreased by 20% since 2014 to 2015, from 12,750 to 10,145. There has been a 27% decrease in applications in IFAs and a 13% decrease in LAs.*



*Despite the increase in completed applications since 2015 to 2016, the proportion of those that were approved has decreased over the same period. In 2015 to 2016, 44% of completed applications were approved, compared with 32% this year. There has been a decrease in proportions of approved applications in both sectors over the years. However, it is most notable in the LA sector, where only 26% of completed applications led to approvals this year, compared with 45% in 2015 to 2016. The large proportional decrease this year in the LA sector is accounted for by the large increase in number of withdrawals, particularly those withdrawn by the service. This change might be as a result of COVID-19 but we will need to wait until we have next year's data to be able to make any real comparisons."*

(Ofsted, Fostering in England 2020-2021 11.11.2021)

The above data mirrors what we are experiencing in Manchester and we are analysing and responding to our findings. We have a disparity between need and enquiry, with the vast majority of interest coming from people who wish to care for babies and young children. Our older cohort of children requiring foster homes remains prevalent and we are attempting to address this through promotional campaigns and awareness.

We have also been working with our partners in GM to implement a GM strategy to target and recruit new carers, given this is a local and national issue. The GM campaign will launch on the 15th May 2023 with Manchester headlining the campaign for the start of Fostering Fortnight. Pooling resource and producing a strong marketing campaign should support our recruitment drive. Manchester consistently aims to retain foster carers in line with the national average.

To provide an overview of the changing climate below are the total number of Recruited carers approved in previous years:

2019/20 = 28

2020/21 = 23

2021/22 = 12

2022/23 = 20

We experienced a significantly decline in 2021/22. This, we believe was a result of Covid-19 and our targeted recruitment drive which has seen the conversion rate for enquiries to assessment be significantly lower due to the needs of Our Children.

In 2021/22 we experienced a net decrease of 22 fostering households. Due to larger numbers leaving the service and a decline in new applications. Whilst the de registrations relate to an ageing Foster Carer cohort and changes in circumstances relating to other caring responsibilities, we have been unable to recruit enough new foster carers to replace those exiting the service.

In 2022/23 we made progress with 20 new household approved and 23 deregistered, giving us a net loss of 3 fostering households. Whilst this is a much improved picture it remains worrying in respect of our ability to achieve our ambition of offering a foster family to every child that needs one.

Our targeted advertisements are aimed generically for fostering. Our strategy around recruitment remains ongoing in terms of requiring EDS carers, carers that can support children of all ages 0-18years but specifically 8 and above and carers that can support sibling groups. Our campaigns still aim to recruit people that have worked with children and have understanding of children's development and needs.





## Recruitment Data overview:

- Number of initial enquiries:

The data shows that overall, we have seen a progressive decline in the initial enquiries since 2020 which has been in line with the other GM authorities.

- Conversion rate of initial enquiry to application:

12.2% of initial enquiries resulted in application and we have seen this progressively increased during the last 3 years.

- Conversion of application to approval:

The GM trend tends to show that conversion from initial enquiry to application has increased and just over half have resulted in approval. We have seen 69.7% of approval during 12-month period which is the second highest of the GM authorities in the captured data.

- Number of approvals over a 12-month period:

Whilst the number from applications to approvals has progressively fallen Manchester's rate of approval was 0.7% which comparatively as a Council we have continue to increase comparatively over the last 3 years.

- Fostering service size: Net change in approved households:

This data considers both recruitment and retention during 2021/2022 we saw a huge decline in approved households despite the approvals made we experienced a net decrease of 19. This picture improved for 2022/23 with a net loss of 5 households. Whilst this is still not sufficiently meeting demand, Manchester were top ranked in terms of net change within the year compared to our GM partners.

- Foster carer approvals over a 12 month period:

Approvals as a proportion of service size over 12 month rolling period was 10.7% which makes us the second highest in GM.

- Carer exits:

In 2022/23 23 Foster Carers left the service. This was largely due to changes in foster carers circumstance and health. Only 1 Foster family transferred to another agency and 5 left the service following concerns about their ability to undertake the role.



## Looked After Children/ Needs Analysis

There is a growing proportion of specialist looked after children's placements, which require specific talents from our recruited foster carers.

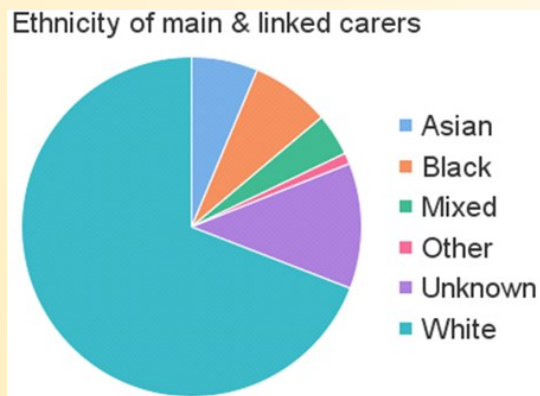
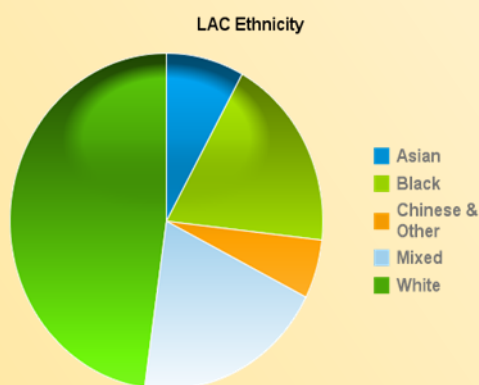
Our Sufficiency Strategy identifies Manchester has 1,350 Children Looked After of which 875 have been looked after for over 18 months.

The number of Our Children who have had three or more placements has reduced in line with our statistical neighbours, though the number of Our Children who have remained in a placement for two years or longer has decreased slightly.

While some of Our Children are living out of area, the number that are within 20 miles of their home has increased.

The biggest cohort of children are aged of 10+ and male.

We know that our children come from a diverse range of cultures and our carer demographic is currently 70% White. Having looked at the data we need to concentrate on recruiting from the following communities: Carers who live in dual heritage/ mixed heritage households and Black



We are passionate advocates for Our Children. Consultation and engagement has identified four consistent themes from young people, these were:

- Time – for young people to build trusting relationships with professionals, and with family.
- Help and support – with education, mental health and wellbeing, and life skills.
- The 'day-to-day (small) things' - such as access to Wi-Fi and social media.
- Young-person centred decision making - young people repeatedly described examples of not being heard, listened to, or included in decision making.

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Under the National Transfer Scheme there is a voluntary agreement that local authorities would accept UASC up to 7% of its total child population. Within Manchester this could amount to 98 UAS children and young people. Manchester looked after 6.5% UAS children and young people. 25% of these children are living with foster families in Manchester. This has increased in recent months with 13% of our looked after population being unaccompanied children. This is now a priority for our recruitment strategy.



## What do we need now?

- ⇒ Foster carers for teenagers (10+).
- ⇒ Foster carers for sibling groups.
- ⇒ Foster carers who reflect our children's cultural identity and ethnicity.
- ⇒ Emergency carers.
- ⇒ Short Break Carers for children with disabilities.
- ⇒ Long term and permanence carers for children with disabilities.
- ⇒ Foster carers for young offenders, alternative to custody.
- ⇒ UASC carers.
- ⇒ Parent & Child foster placements.
- ⇒ Carers with a passion and experience of supporting and caring for children with complex emotional and mental health needs.

## Ambition for 2023/25

- **Our ambition is to recruit 40 additional foster carers per financial year, some of whom will need to include the specific types outlined above.** Manchester's goal is to ensure that a foster carer is available for every child in Manchester that needs one. Whilst the target set has been lowered this is due to the challenging climate and setting a realistic target whilst balancing the needs of Our Children. Due to our specific targeted recruitment campaign in terms of the needs and demographics of Our Children considered it is hoped this can be achieved.
- Work closely with the Communities to support the cultural heritage and identities of Our Children.
- Forge links with Local MP's to build relationships and champion our fostering campaign and initiatives within the communities. In terms of the impact this will support placement stability and support our children's identity and cultural needs.

## Audience

Our focus is to recruit single people, or couples who have the following altruistic characteristics;

- Have done paid or voluntary work, are active in their local community;
- know someone who has fostered or adopted or was fostered or adopted themselves.

We, therefore, require resilient foster carers who are able to rise to the challenge of caring for an increasing number of children as outlined above who need stability and a sense of belonging. This is, in addition to the recruitment of foster carers for younger children as there is an ongoing need in this area. It is understood that as foster carers become more experienced and confident in their roles and with additional support and training these carers may extend their offering to help older children in the future.

## Carers who will:

- Have resilience and perseverance when things get tough. 'Stickability'
- Be flexible and adaptable.
- Have patience and a good sense of humour.
- Work in partnership with the team around the child.
- Be committed to children and willing to learn of the impact of trauma.
- Will sign up and believe in our code of ethics; Our Manchester, Our Children, Our Communities, Our Responsibility.



## We aim too: -

- Roll out an ambitious marketing strategy and calendar of city-wide events promoting the need for more foster carers in Manchester on a regular basis.
- Continue our focus on grassroots / local recruitment in Manchester communities targeting those groups that research shows us are more likely to respond to the call to foster due to faith, values, political beliefs, a background working with families, in caring professions or having altruistic motivation.
- Offer a timely response at every stage of Manchester's fostering journey.
- Carer recruitment is business-critical and everybody's business therefore the recruitment strategy requires staff and Council ownership of the Campaign Plan.
- Recruitment will be seen as every Council employee and Elected Members business and regular top-down communication will be visible from the Chief Executive, Elected Members and Senior Managers about the success of the campaign and what we expect staff to do to support it. This is part of our Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.



## Ongoing Work Undertaken by the Recruitment and Assessment Team

All initial enquiry calls with the public are discussed within 1 working day with the Team Manager and where applicants are progressing, a date for a home visit is arranged the same day as the initial phone call, which is a suitable date and time for the applicant. Home visits are offered within 48 hours of the call or when convenient for the enquirer. At the home visit, experienced social work staff will go into more detail about what fostering entails, along with having a tour of the applicant's home.

Skills to Foster Training is flexibly timetabled and can be put on as and when necessary to work with participants and to ensure a continuing flow of potential foster carers through the assessment process. Reminder emails and phone calls are sent a week before training starts to all applicants booked onto training. During 2022-2023 we ran a total of 5 STF training cohorts.

The social worker who completes an applicant's home visit will become their contact worker and keep in touch prior to, during and after training to ensure consistency and professional response.

Applicants are allocated an assessing social worker within five working days of their training being completed. The assessor contacts them to make the first appointment within this five-day time frame.

The aim is for assessments to be presented at the Fostering Panel within 12 weeks of allocation to assessing social workers.

Newly recruited carers will continue to be supported by their assessing social worker until their first review takes place and they will have a dedicated support group for this period. Unless carer/s have transferred from an Independent Agency, then following completion of their assessment they will be allocated to a Supervising Social Worker within the Recruited Team.

We continue to 'retarget' initial enquiries. To reconnect with enquirers who meet the criteria but are not yet ready to commit. Research shows that the public do not always differentiate between public sector and independent fostering agencies.

We propose to send these enquirers a monthly e-news bulletin to include, videos, recruitment event dates, answer FAQ about fostering and human-interest case studies. Through the work underpinned as part of the joint marketing strategy with GM and Eleven they will also hold enquiries contact data with regular newsletters, remain on mailing list for retargeting.

- The duty worker will keep on the recording log and set a quarterly timescale in maintaining contact to gain updates and review applicant's position. Our aim is to ensure that when they are ready to commit, our efforts to keep them 'warm' will result in them building brand loyalty to Manchester City Council fostering service and enquire with us again.

## Fostering Assessments

The initial assessment visit discusses all elements of the assessment process and a working agreement and all dates for the assessment visits are agreed and signed by all parties at the first meeting. The number of visits required to complete the assessment is usually six to eight.

In line with the Stage 1, Stage 2 Recruitment of Carer Standards, face to face interviews with referees, adult children, all members of the household, ex-partners work references and children's schools are booked within the first third of the assessment ensuring safeguarding information is collected earlier in the assessments.

An in-depth audit and quality assurance on all assessments is completed by the team manager prior to management sign off. This process provides an analysis, along with evidence of resilience and strengths of applicants as well as areas of vulnerability and future support needs. It requires that all statutory checks, foster care agreements and referee information are seen, dated and signed and on the council's electronic system. Applicants are required to complete an evaluation form of their experience of their assessment and sign, date and comment on their assessment report evidencing they have read it and understand the recommendations.

Manchester's Fostering Panel has a review form to ascertain the quality of every assessment report, as well as the assessor's performance at Panel, informing individual development and team performance.

The duty worker will keep on the recording log and set a quarterly timescale in maintaining contact to gain updates and review applicant's position. Our aim is to ensure that when they are ready to commit, our efforts to keep them 'warm' will result in them building brand loyalty to Manchester City Council fostering service and enquire with us again.

## Data Informing Outcomes

Performance data is collated by the Recruitment and Assessment Team to inform the progress of the Recruitment Strategy. Data collected includes:

- numbers of all Initial Enquiries.
- number of Initial enquiry calls (phone calls with people making Initial Enquiry contact with the service).
- the reason members of the public have contacted us, what prompted them to do so, and how they heard about our service.
- numbers of applicants attending Skills to Foster preparation training.
- number of applicants allocated for assessment.
- number of applicants approved as foster carers.
- foster carers deregistered.
- we keep data on those applicants who go on to be approved foster carers through the 'tell a friend scheme'.
- Data is collected on the applicants who are approved as follows: age, relationship status, gender, ethnicity, religion or faith, sexuality, smoking status, geographical location, car driver, pet owners, all informing our future recruitment strategy.
- numbers of Home Visits.
- numbers of applicants attending Skills to Foster preparation training.
- number of applicants allocated for assessment.
- number of applicants approved as foster carers.
- foster carers deregistered.
- we keep data on those applicants who go on to be approved foster carers through the 'tell a friend scheme'.
- Data is collected on the applicants who are approved as follows: age, relationship status, gender, ethnicity, religion or faith, sexuality, smoking status, geographical location, car driver, pet owners, all informing our future recruitment strategy.



## Community presence:

We will endeavour to increase our community presence across the next two years with the following plans:

### ◆ Information evenings and presentations

We currently run one formal information evening per month (excluding August, due to many people being away in the summer holidays). This equates to 11 information evenings per year. These are run using free MCC spaces, predominantly the libraries, across the city. The only cost incurred for these events is the inventory of materials, such as welcome booklets, that we may give to attendees. These are already advertised on the MCC website, and consist of a planned presentation, with question-and-answer opportunities at the end.

### ◆ Drop in sessions

The aim of the strategy is to increase these to 12 a year, equating to one a month. The recruitment and marketing officer of the team will use free spaces for these. These are more informal sessions to give the public a chance to drop in and ask questions about fostering. The officer will build relationships with local establishments across the city, such as coffee shops, but equally utilise free MCC spaces across the city. These will also be advertised on the MCC website. The cost incurred for these will only be for marketing materials used.

### ◆ Attendance at faith groups/cultural groups

The recruitment and marketing officer will build relationships with local faith and cultural groups across the city, to increase our recruitment of applicants from BAME backgrounds. The minimum will be one every other month across the city, however, this may be increased dependent on the availability of the groups. Our attendance at each group will be lead by the groups themselves, and we hope to increase our presence once established and trusting professional relationships are made. The cost associated with this type of activity will be for marketing materials.

### ◆ MCC run events

The fostering recruitment team have already made connections with other MCC teams across the council regarding events run by MCC in the community that we have attended. We will continue to do this throughout the next 2 years. The teams include the Neighbourhoods team and the Council events team. The frequency of these are not set, and we continue to liaise with them for upcoming events. The cost of these relates to marketing materials.

### ◆ Funded community events

Over the next two years, the recruitment team aim to attend 10 funded community events per year. These are events which we have enquired with the organisations running the events for costs of having a paid stand in attendance. We are selecting events that will target people from a range of demographics and communities across the city. For example, stands at the following 3 events will be replicated each year:

Eid festival, May 2023

Caribbean Carnival, August 2023

Manchester Pride, August 2023



We are also working collaboratively with the GMCA partners for some events, to share the cost between the Local Authorities. For example, Stockport LA are arranging and funding the Pride stand, and we are arranging and aiming to fund the Caribbean Carnival, therefore, costs can be shared. This also promotes the shared partnership and reciprocal working we are striving to achieve within GMCA to recruit more foster carers for our children.

We know that some of the paid events will be trial and error in terms of net gain of applicants and successful approvals, however, we are aware that in the aftermath of Covid-19, we need to have an increased presence within the community and engage people face to face. Our aim is to invest in developing further community relationships by being present and available for information sharing. It will also increase our ability to learn from communities about the barriers to fostering.

From our research, the average cost for an information stand at large community events, is £250, and this cost, depending on the event, may cover multiple days, for example, the Caribbean Festival costs £300 for a stand, but this is for 2 days. Therefore, we are aiming to run 10 stands over the year, we require £3000 of additional funding to provide this vital resource.

The figure of 10 stands per year is based on the capacity of the Recruitment team, alongside the many cost free events already mentioned, to staff. We will be engaging existing foster carers in all of our recruitment community presence, however, they will continue to need support from qualified members of staff alongside them. Additionally, we feel that 10 paid events across the city, will increase our enquiries, and conversion to approvals, as we are selecting some events that target harder to reach communities, but also wider and larger events in which members of the public from different areas of Manchester attend.

We are going to maintain the strengths in the current campaign strategy:

- target people who have fostered before either through an IFA or local authority;
- or have worked with children in a health or education setting.

Building on the strengths of the current team because our data and evidence over the last two years show that we are attracting the right applicants that match our sufficiency criteria.

Manchester are consistently in the top five Greater Manchester authorities regarding the number of successfully recruited foster carers.

## **Marketing Communications & Social Media**

The fostering service and the communications department continue to work in partnership to maximise the effectiveness of the recruitment of foster carers in Manchester.

Targeting people who have experience of working with children or have fostered before has worked well to generate a high number of detailed calls and home visits: over 1,074 Initial discussions and 132 Initial Visits between March 2020 to December 2022.

We will use the full range of marketing communications, including paid-for advertising, organic content, PR and engagement events in the local community.

It can take an average of six months for a person ready to foster to become an approved foster carer. To meet the service objective of 40 new fostering households, we must concentrate our efforts on increasing the number of people at the bottom of the conversion funnel who have the



## How we Target:

- Paid-for advertising and organic content/channels: include paid-for Facebook ads.
- Emails to keep potential foster carers interested who are suitable for a home visit but not ready to foster.
- Internal comms/role of Corporate Parent: to raise the profile of fostering amongst their staff, communities, and groups.
- Encourage businesses involved in the 'Child Friendly City' project to raise the profile of fostering amongst their staff.
- Outreach to community groups through physical events and Facebook groups.

## Post Covid- Business Continuity Planning

Whilst Covid 19 remains in circulation there are no longer rules in place. During Covid we saw an increase of people working from home and businesses finding alternative ways to work and deliver services. Hybrid models of working have been introduced which continues to offer a degree of flexibility.

Whilst this is positive and has allowed a greater flexibility when considering recruitment and matching, we have also identified that in some cases there has been a reduced reduction in capacity within the home due to bedrooms and available space within the home being utilised as office space which previous would have been available bedroom space for a child to utilise.

We have to respond to new information and keep clear messages on our website and on social media. We continue to plan and schedule Facebook posts through the communications budget.

We have to consider housing needs and population growth. We are currently researching how many houses in Manchester have a spare room, this is being completed on behalf of our Comms team through mosaic profiling. We are targeting altruistic people who believe that Local Authority fostering is the 'proper way' to foster.

Greater challenge has been seen through the 'Cost of Living Crisis' which has seen household expenditure rise which continues to gather pace. This provides uncertainty for people considering fostering or who wish to give up employment due to fostering allowances not being guaranteed. The Service is currently undertaking a mapping exercise in line with GMCA authorities to support their carers with one off incentive to support households within this challenging period.

We have a strong recruitment message and assessment process. We have our own in-house skills to foster team and an adaptable council and continue working in a hybrid model. We continue to deliver;

- Offer virtual and face to face drop-in sessions to suit individual needs
- Calls to foster carers increased.
- Weekly e-bulletin.



- Support the retention of our foster carer workforce through regular forums and ongoing consultation
- Tell a friend scheme

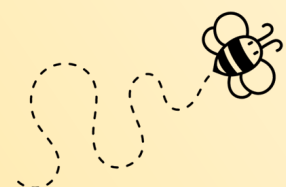
### Role of recruitment & engagement officer:

The service has recently appointed a new recruitment and engagement officer to the post which has been vacant for a considerable amount of time following the predecessor moving on to a new job opportunity.

The role is pertinent to the work which we wish to continue and to build on further. The successful candidate has a degree in marketing and it is envisaged that this will be a fundamental asset for the Service to utilise in house. The recruitment and engagement officer will continue to support Manchester ambassadors and network with fellow recruitment officers within the North West but also as part of the work with GM.

Management of social media and internal comms with existing carers through newsletters, mailing list and also frequent recruitment champions meetings will be co-ordinated to enable ambassadors to support recruitment events/stands, delivery of Skills To Foster training, sharing positive experiences through completion of a catalogue of case studies.

Through a designated person being in the post we will gain traction on the work identified and required within the local community hubs and to support our campaign to recruit carers that meet the needs of our cultural demographics of cared for children.



## Refresh/Rebrand:

Following the first joint recruitment stand held at Trafford Centre in partnership with John Lewis which was a positive experience in January 23. It was recognised that alongside our GM partners we required marketing materials to be updated and to compete with the IFA market and be recognised with our own brand to support our launch campaign. Work has been undertaken to create an inventory of required materials which will assist our ongoing recruitment campaign over the next 5 years. It is recognised that financial support in this area is required for ongoing and future investment whilst the initial outlay is required this will create an inventory of supplies which will last for a minimum of 5 years. Whilst total cost is to be finalised a minimum of additional £2000.00 will be required.



The service has been consulted as part of logo and rebranding designs and 7 different designs were created with the following 2 designs being selected as the most desired designs.

### Design 1

Bee a Foster Carer for Manchester



### Design 2

Bee a Foster Carer for Manchester



We are now producing merchandise and clothing with our new branding on to increase our visibility and to be recognisable in the local and fostering community.



We are also refreshing our flyers, posters and pull up banners to respond to need.



## Carer Retention

We have a duty when we recruit carers to ensure that they receive the best service from Manchester City Council. In addition, we have a responsibility to ensure that they experienced a high level of satisfaction. We will continually evaluate our own service and take immediate action where required to ensure that carers are being supported in all areas. We will continue with a clear engagement plan that informs all areas of what we currently offer Manchester foster carers. This will form part of our 'service personality' and will be supported by all staff.



We are committed to carer retention and this is demonstrated in the increased number of Foster Carers remaining with Manchester City Council in the past 12 months. We have improved our co-production with carers and this year we have hosted and planned a series of foster carer events including: Annual Christmas Party, Annual Awards Ceremony, Monthly Support Groups and Developing a Foster Carer Skills Swap. We are also creating a calendar of events for children which will provide a natural break for carers and exciting opportunities for children. We are doing this in conjunction with the Child Friendly City leads. We have already planned 2 trips to Ghyll Head which will provide a 3 day outward bound residential trip for 30 of our children over the summer holidays.



We continue to focus on recruiting and retaining foster carers for our older children (aged 10 upwards) We are working with our foster carer Ambassadors to encourage people to foster older children and to promote our support offer. This support offer now includes planned drop-in sessions at Alonzi Hub and specific training and support with our YOS and Complex Safeguarding partners.

We have worked with our Alonzi Hub via a referral scheme offer to develop a bespoke placement stability offer to our carers. This provides access to a range of support offers including:

- ◆ Mental Health support worker
- ◆ Speech and Language therapist
- ◆ Clinical Psychologist
- ◆ Short Break
- ◆ Outreach support

We are also working with CAMHS to create a therapeutic training course which includes a focus on self care and support to foster carers in their roles.

In response to the Care Review we have also refreshed our support offer to our Kinship Carers. Our refreshed offer includes regular family events, regular feedback days, an increase in support groups and a bespoke preparation training. We have also liked with CAMHS to provide a specific Kinship Training offer,



To recruit and retain our carers for children with disabilities we are also strengthening our Support Offer and our Short Breaks provision. We have established a steering group with our partners in education, health and SEND to focus on recruiting new carers, support to existing carers and ensuring they are linked in with the Local Offer and specialist support when necessary.

In 2023 we will also be commissioning a service for our families and foster carers caring for children with learning difficulties and/or autism. This support will ensure that:

-Carers are equipped and supported for when a child's behaviour becomes challenging.

-Foster carers are provided with strategies and support to create and maintain placements for children with learning difficulties and/ or autism

-Foster carers have access to a 24 hour telephone support

We also have the launch of Mockingbird which is an exciting step in our journey

## Development and implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)

Manchester is proud to be implementing the Mockingbird Family Model within the Fostering Service. It is in the implementation stages. We aim to introduce our first constellation in July 2023 and increase the number of constellations to two per year over the duration of this Strategy. We will review this approach throughout the life of this Strategy.



1. 6-10 families
2. 6-18 children
3. 2 spare beds
4. Diverse



## What is the Mocking Bird Model;

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an **extended family model** which provides sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

### Key elements:

- Peer guidance and support
- Sleepovers
- Training and development
- Socials
- Support to permanence
- Siblings and birth family

### Key Fidelity:

## Impact

- Improved placement stability – reduced placement breakdown
- Improved experience of peer support
- Improved sibling contact
- Improved process and experience of sleepovers
- Improved skills, confidence and role satisfaction for foster carers
- Improved levels of carer retention and recruitment

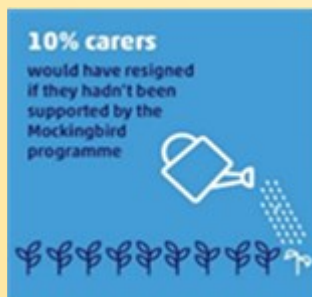
## Retention & Stability

Monitoring data shows an increase in the number of satellite families remaining in Mockingbird compared to previous years.

- ◆ 88% satellite homes remaining part of mockingbird in 2020-2021 compared with 74% in 2019-20.

There was also a reported reduction in the percentage of satellite home that ceased to foster during 2020-21.

- ◆ Only 2.4% constellation members stopped fostering 2020-21 compared to 5% in 2019-20.



“Our Manchester Strategy places children and young people at the heart of its vision. Our aim is to ensure that Our Children will have the right home, in the right place at the right time.”



April 2023

Steph Badley-Recruitment & Assessment Team Manager

Billie Walbank– Fostering Service Lead

