

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 21 June 2023

Subject: Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023-25

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

Summary

This is the 2023-25 Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy. This sets out our ambitions for the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Manchester. It identifies our recruitment targets and support offer and how we aim to recruit and retain more foster carers for our children who need foster families.

Our previous strategy was implemented from 2021-23 and our successes were:

- 6% more of our children are now living in foster families in Manchester. This supports our ambition for our children to remain in their communities, to continue to see their friends and families and to continue their education with minimal disruption.
- In 2022-23 we doubled our number of approvals with 22 new Foster Families recruited in the city.
- We have also improved our retention of foster carers by, ensuring the right foster carers remain supported and continue to provide family homes for our Manchester children. In 2021-22, 10% of our foster carers exited the service. However, in 2022-23 we achieved an increase of 1.89%. Whilst we are focusing on further improvement, in the national context this was an achievement for our city.
- We have also continued to demonstrate the success of our recruitment campaign and despite declining numbers of enquiries nationally and locally, we have continued to convert initial enquiries through to approval with 70% of those enquiring progressing through to approval within the last 12 months. This makes us the second highest performing authority in Greater Manchester.
- In regard to recruiting more carers who meet our children's cultural needs we did not have the impact required over the past 12 months. However, we have made progress in the last 3 months, with more carers approved from non-white backgrounds.

Our renewed strategy went live in conjunction with us celebrating Fostering Fortnight this May. Over the past 2 years we have seen a decline in people applying to become recruited Foster Carers alongside an increase in children living in Kinship Care arrangements. To respond to this, we have refreshed our recruitment and

retention strategy. Our recruitment work, as detailed in the strategy, focuses on re engaging with our local communities, spreading the word on Fostering and developing a core offer of support which is well utilised and understood.

In 2022 we gained 'Fostering Friendly' status and we have promoted this throughout the council. During Fostering Fortnight, we held webinars and events within the organisation to celebrate this and on the back of this we received 2 new applications from staff in the service. We are scheduled to promote this status and offer across all council buildings in Manchester over the coming months.

We have also undertaken lots of work in our local communities, we held an information day in Beswick which included an 'Ad Van' driving around North Manchester to promote awareness, we attended the Muslim Heritage Centre to celebrate Eid and provide further information about Fostering. We have also held regular information events at Mosques across the city. We have plans over the coming months to promote Fostering at the Caribbean Carnival and Eid Ul Adha events. We have also linked with MPs in areas where we need to recruit more foster carers (Hulme, Moss Side and Levenshulme) to promote our service.

We have worked with community leads to understand the need of our communities and the barriers to fostering. Our hair and skin care training for foster carers recently featured on the BBC's Northwest Tonight and was commended for 'helping to stop afro hair discrimination' and supporting the cultural needs of our children in care.

Alongside our Greater Manchester Partners we have also launched our online 'Fostering Unfiltered' campaign.

We have also implemented the internationally recognised Mockingbird Family Model in our Service. This model improves experiences of foster families and results in improved recruitment and retention.

As we have emerged from Covid-19 restrictions we have also taken the opportunity to celebrate our Foster Carers and Foster Families. In the past few months, a selection of our families enjoyed afternoon tea with the Lord Mayor, we held our Christmas Party, our Annual Foster Carers Awards ceremony for the first time in 3 years and we have increased our social events calendar with regular formal and informal opportunities for foster families to meet.

In conjunction with our recruitment drive we have strengthened our retention offer. In response to the Care Review we have refreshed our Kinship Care Offer. We now offer tailored Kinship Preparation Training; we are working with CAMHS to create a bespoke training course for Kinship Carers and following feedback from our carers we have relaunched our support groups. These are now 'Family Events' which are open to carers and their children. These events have received positive feedback with children expressing how good it felt to know that there are other children in similar situations across Manchester. Engagement with our SGO offer also continues to rise, with increased numbers of guardians attending SGO support groups, an increase in specialist support accessed via the Adoption Support Fund and regular calls to the support line. We have received positive feedback from SGO carers on the impact of our post SGO offer.

We know that wrap around support and guidance is essential for foster families to thrive. That's why in 2023-25 we are strengthening our stability offer for foster families. We are working closely with CAMHS, Youth and Play, Participation and Engagement, our Family Hubs and our Unicef Child Friendly City Team to ensure we have a robust support offer which includes regular drops ins, events, training and specialist intervention. We will ensure that this offer is widely understood and accessed by foster families across the city.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee Members consider the progress and impact being achieved by the Fostering Service in Manchester and the goals set out for 2023-25 with regard to;

- (1) The recruitment of more foster carers in Manchester. With a specific focus on recruiting foster carers who reflect the identity of our cared for children.
- (2) The retention of existing foster carers through a clear and robust support offer which meets the needs of our carers and foster families.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
None

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments
This service, policy or function does not impact adversely on different protected or disadvantaged groups. Our strategy aims to promote further equality, diversity and inclusion within our service delivery and recruitment.

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Fostering Service employ staff and foster carers from a range of cultural backgrounds, which reflects the culture and ethnicity of most of the children we work with
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	The Fostering Service employ staff with experience and knowledge of the area. We work with staff across the service and take a role in driving improvements and development across the city.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	We are now working in our local communities and within our organisation to recruit more Manchester Foster Carers and Social Workers with the skills and potential to deliver on our ambitions.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	The Fostering Service have a specific recruitment strategy for new staff, and we have successfully recruited new talent to the service over the last year.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	The Fostering Service are involved in the GMCA, Coram Baaf, Fostering Network and Northwest Leads networks. We have also implemented the internationally recognised Mockingbird Programme in 2022.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

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

Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023-25