

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 10 January 2024

Subject: Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023

Report of: Strategic Director (Children and Education Services)

Summary

Manchester is a large local authority with a total of 1,340 children in our care on the 31.3.23. The Fostering Service ambition is to provide foster families for all those children who need one. We continue to strive to meet this ambition and this report sets out what we have achieved over the past year (1st April 2022-31st March 2023) and what our priorities are for the coming year.

Successes for 2022-2023

- Our Ofsted Inspection took place in April 2022 and we were judged to be ‘good’ with our children in care and children in Private Fostering Arrangements judged to be living in ‘safe and secure homes’.
- This year we have doubled the number of new foster carers approved within the year.
- This year we have retained more foster carers in the service. Whilst we need to increase our net gain, in the current climate the improved retention is a success for the service.
- The Kinship Assessment team returned to the Fostering Service this year with the aim of improving the assessment and support offered to our kinship carers. In the initial year we have identified significant improvements in these areas.
- The quality of our practice continues to improve across the service with a 17% drop in deferrals at panel. Indicating that our assessments and quality of practice are in line with requirements.
- We have been successful in our strategy to ensure that our Fostering Panel represents the community they serve. The panel now accurately represents the general population of Manchester as identified in the ONS Census data 2021. We also have a larger cohort of panel members from Black backgrounds, which reflects the larger cohort of Black children within our cared for population.
- In November 2022 we implemented the Fostering Networks Mockingbird Model. This new initiative is an evidenced based ‘extended family model’ which improves the experiences of foster families and consequently supports recruitment and retention. This will support our aim to be able to offer a foster family to every child in Manchester that needs one.
- In December 2022 Manchester City Council were awarded ‘Fostering Friendly’ status for our work to support existing foster carers and to promote fostering within our organisation.

Priority actions for 2023-24

- We have not been successful in recruiting enough new Foster Carers to provide a foster family in Manchester for every child who needs one. For 2023-24 this continues to be a priority. We want to achieve a net gain with an increase of Foster Carers across Manchester.
- We still need more carers who meet our children’s cultural needs. We will be specifically targeting people who are able to care for our older children, and people who are able to meet our children’s racial, cultural and identity needs.
- We need to further embed our stability offer for our carers. This will support recruitment and retention of foster carers and help them to feel more confident in caring for our older children. This will achieve greater stability for our children who will be able to remain living with their foster families.
- We will develop our support and training offer for Kinship Carers to meet the specific needs of these families and to support families to progress to legal permanence so that children can grow up within their kinship networks, without ongoing social work intervention.
- We will launch our new training programme in Autumn 2023, we will continue to evaluate the impact of training and promote the requirement of training for our foster families.
- We will embed a ‘whole system approach’ working alongside our colleagues in the children’s teams and wider directorate.
- We will continue to build and support a stable, diverse, confident and talented workforce in the fostering service.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to consider the progress and impact being achieved by the Fostering Service in Manchester and the goals set out for 2023-24 with regard to:

1. Recruiting more foster carers, and carers who meet our children’s cultural needs.
2. Retaining the right foster carers and supporting them to ‘stick with’ our children and provide them with stable and loving homes.
3. Developing our kinship offer to ensure our families and communities are offered the right support to care for the children in their networks and to provide them with a permanent home.

Wards Affected: All

<p>Environmental Impact Assessment -the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in</p>	<p>This service, policy or function does not impact adversely on different protected or disadvantaged groups. Our strategy aims to promote further</p>

meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments	equality, diversity and inclusion within our service delivery and recruitment.
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Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the Our Manchester Strategy/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 North West 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

Financial Consequences – Revenue

None

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

Contact Officers:

Name: Billie Walbank
Position: Service Lead Fostering
Telephone: 0161 277 1605
E-mail: billie.walbank@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Adele Ion
Position: Assistant Director Provider Services
Telephone: 0161 277 1605
E-mail: adele.ion@manchester.gov.uk

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.

Fostering Annual Report 2022-23

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report is prepared for those with executive responsibility for children's services and corporate parenting, to enable consideration of the service and to be assured that the local authority is having a positive impact on Our Children.

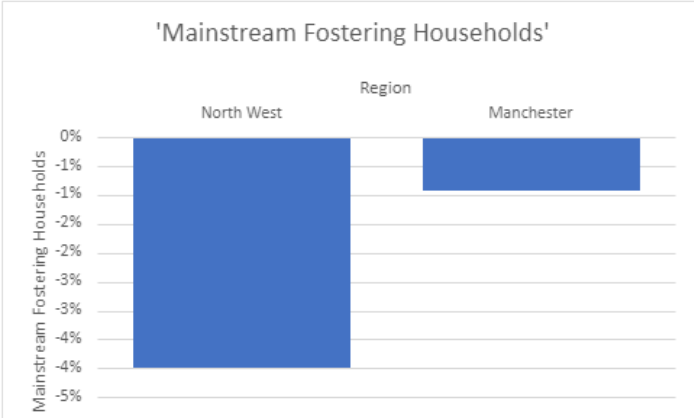
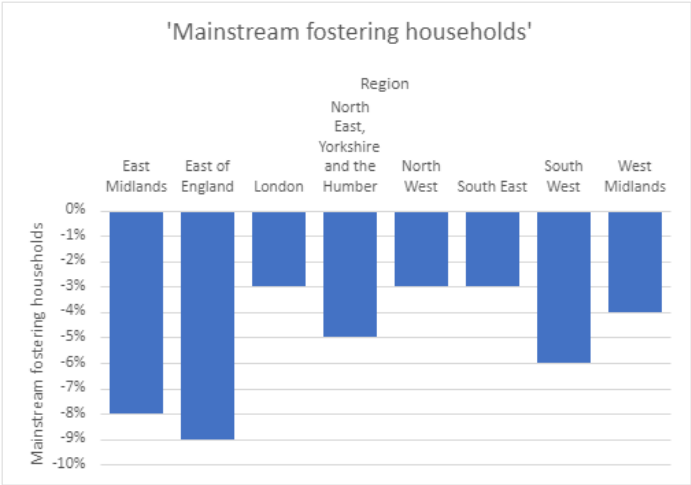
2.0 Background

- 2.1 This Fostering Service Report meets the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Service: National Minimum Standard 25.7 The Regulation states that the 'executive side of the local authority;'
1. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every quarter.
 2. Monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users.
 3. Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 2.2 This report is completed annually and this report covers 2022-23. It measures our progress and what we have achieved over the past year. It also sets out our priorities for the next year.

3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 Since the annual report was produced, we have made progress against our priority actions.
- 3.2 Unfortunately, the national picture remains a concern.
- 3.3 The Office for National Statistics have now published their report 'Fostering in England April 1 2022 to March 31 2023.' The findings report:
- 3.4 At the end of March 2023, there were around 43,400 fostering households in England. This total has remained fairly stable over the last 5 years, but the make-up has altered. Since 2019, the number of mainstream LA households has fallen by 11%, and the number of family and friends households has increased by 21%.
- 3.5 This year, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of LA households.
- 3.6 The number of applications in 2022 to 2023 (8,010) was the lowest in several years, at 18% lower than 2018 to 2019 (9,740). In 4 of the last 5 years there has been a year-on-year decrease in applications. Over the same period, the number of deregistrations has fluctuated. This year, the number of leavers exceeded the number of joiners.

3.7 This mirrors our experience in Manchester. However, our recruitment and retention figures do exceed the national and local figures with the number of households exiting Manchester in 2022-23 being less than 1%.



3.8 Despite the challenges faced we have made continued progress this year.

3.9 Of the households recruited since April 23: 60% are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 40% are white British. Of the 60%, 20% are black Caribbean and black African households, 26% are Asian households and 14% are families with Middle Eastern heritage. The new foster families entering our service reflect the diverse population of Manchester and our children.

3.10 Our support and stability offer has also continued to develop and this year to date we have experienced fewer carers leaving the service. We have worked closely with our partners to strengthen our offer and the majority of our carers report that they feel well supported and receive a 'good' or 'excellent' service in Manchester.

3.11 In October 23 we launched our first Mockingbird Constellation in South Manchester. This constellation includes the Hub home carers and 6 fostering households (both recruited and kinship carers). The launch has been a success, and we are now planning our second constellation to be launched in the North or Central district.

- 3.12 This success is also impacting on our children, and we have experienced a decrease in children experiencing 3 moves or more. This year this has decreased from 10.4% to 9.6%. More of our children have also remained in their foster family for over 2 years. This has increased from 64% to 66%.
- 3.13 In recognition of the huge contribution that our kinship carers offer to our children we have also developed and strengthened our kinship offer. This year we have 2% more of our children living with Kinship Carers and we have achieved a further 8% drop (since April 23) in children who are moving from these carers in an unplanned way. We have worked alongside our kinship carers to gather their views and wishes. In response to this we have launched a bespoke training offer. Which includes preparation training, 'Foundations to Attachment' training alongside CAMHS and regular 'Family Events' which provide an opportunity for informal peer support and for children living in kinship arrangements to be able to meet other children with shared experiences. This was something that our kinship families told us would support them and the impact of this is clear.
- 3.14 Our Training programme continues to develop with a focus on trauma informed approaches to care. We have worked alongside CAMHS and 'Beyond Psychology' to deliver face to face and virtual training which focuses on therapeutic approaches to support children recover from trauma. This training has been accessed by foster carers and our staff within the service have also accessed trauma informed training programmes to build on this shared language, understanding and approach.
- 3.15 We have continued to build and support a stable, diverse, confident and talented workforce in the fostering service. We have focused on recruitment of new workers and developing our existing cohort with regular training, learning opportunities and development sessions and days. We are experiencing great success in this area and we have achieved a 19% decrease in our vacancy rate and a 15% decrease in turnover this year.
- 3.16 We continue to experience the national and local pressures in relation to fostering and our ability to offer a foster family to every child in Manchester who needs one. However, we continue to work creatively and consistently to address the challenges and to support our children to live in stable and loving homes with care givers who can meet their needs and support them to thrive.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 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 2023-24 with regard to:
1. Recruiting more foster carers, and carers who meet our children's cultural needs.
 2. Retaining the right foster carers and supporting them to 'stick with' our children and provide them with stable and loving homes.

3. Developing our kinship offer to ensure our families and communities are offered the right support to care for the children in their networks and to provide them with a permanent home.

5.0 Appendices

5.1 Appendix 1 - Annual Fostering Report 2022-2023