

MAYOR AND CABINET		
Report Title	Fostering Statement of Purpose 2014-2015 and Children's Guides - My Guide to Foster Care.	
Key decision	Yes	Item No.
Ward	All	
Contributors	Executive Director for Children and Young People	
Class	Open	Date: 16 July 2014

1. Summary of the Report

This report presents to the Mayor, the Lewisham Fostering Statement of Purpose for 2014 – 2015 as required by the Fostering Regulations 2011. The Lewisham Fostering Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guides are reviewed on an annual basis, in line with statutory requirements. The Fostering Statement of Purpose focuses on the desired outcomes for Looked After Children in line with the Every Child Matters 5 objectives. Fostering is undergoing fundamental improvement nationally and in this regard, legislation is imminent.

2. Purpose and Structure of the Report

The purpose of this report is to present for approval the updated Lewisham Fostering Statement of Purpose for 2014-2015 and Children's Guides – My Guide to Foster Care.

3. Recommendation

That the Mayor approves the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service for 2014-2015 and Children's Guides – My Guide to Foster Care.

4. Policy Context

- 4.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011 require all Fostering Services to provide and review annually a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and facilities provided.
- 4.2 The Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 require Fostering Services to produce and regularly review a Children's Guide. In January 2013, we produced more age appropriate Children's Guides one for children up to age of 11 and the other for teenagers, which have been updated.
- 4.3 The Lewisham Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is in line with the Council's corporate priorities and contributes particularly to: Community

leadership and empowerment, young people's achievement and involvement, safety, security and a visible presence, protection of children and active, healthy citizens.

4.4 The Statement of Purpose continues to contribute to five of the key priority outcomes of Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020:

- **Ambitious and achieving** – where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential.
- **Safer** – where people feel safe and live free from crime, antisocial behaviour and abuse.
- **Empowered and responsible** – where people are actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities.
- **Healthy, active and enjoyable** – where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and well-being.
- **Dynamic and prosperous** – where people are part of vibrant communities and town centres, well connected to London and beyond.

5. Background

5.1 The Fostering Service primarily provides a service for Looked After Children. The service is committed to identifying and supporting stable placements for children where foster care is the identified plan.

5.2 Currently, there are 503 Lewisham Looked After Children. The Fostering Service has 239 individuals approved as Lewisham foster carers, this comprises 162 Fostering Households with approximately 196 Looked After Children in placement and 198 are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies. The rest of Lewisham Looked After children are in supporting lodging, hostels, secure units, placed at home with parents or adopters, residential schools, or in prison. In addition, there are approximately 31 households in the pipeline and a creative recruitment campaign continues which involves use of YouTube, bus adverts and leafleting. This is a significant increase in foster carers, which we are determined to sustain over time.

5.3 In Lewisham our lowest fostering rate is £315.85 and our highest is £473.45, therefore our average rate is £394.15. Independent Fostering Agencies lowest rate is £693.00 and the highest rate is £835.00 with an average rate of £764.00. Every placement with an Independent Fostering Agencies costs Lewisham an additional average of £369.25.

5.4 At present, only 40% of Looked After Children are placed with Lewisham foster carers and our aim is to place 50% of the Looked After Children population of 500 with Lewisham foster carers within the next year. To achieve this we are recruiting more foster carers and we hope to recruit 50 fostering households within the year. The table in 5.5 shows our progress in recruiting foster carers.

5.5 In 2013/ 2014, we had a successful recruitment:

Fostering Households	38
Individual Foster Carers	56

	Households	Placements
1	19	19
1 or 2 if sibs	8	8
2	9	18
2 or 3 if sibs	1	2
3	1	3
Total	38	50

5.6 The Fostering Service is required through Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 to undertake appropriate recruitment of Foster Carers and provide training, support and development for foster carers. We are confident that by December 2014, we will have approved 200 Fostering Households. The current number of foster carers has increased and to achieve 200 will be a major achievement. But even more important, this will mean that the majority of Lewisham Looked After Children appropriate for foster care, will be placed with Lewisham Foster Carers. Over the next 12 months, the Council would be in a position to reduce reliance on the Independent Fostering Agencies, especially as we are recruiting more foster carers, who can take siblings and parent and child placements.

5.7 Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 require that Supervising Social Workers from the Fostering Service provide advice and support to foster carers and work in partnership with the Looked After Child's Social Worker to deliver the best possible outcomes for the child in placement. Lewisham Foster Carers are highly positive about the support they receive from Supervising Social Workers and managers at every level of the Council.

5.8 The Lewisham Fostering Panel exercises its role fully as laid out in the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards, 2011. The Fostering Panel is chaired by an independent person who is also a qualified social worker, and is not employed by Lewisham Council. The current chair is an international highly regarded expert in fostering currently also working in Sweden and Japan as well as throughout the UK in Children's Social Care. The vice-chair is similarly an independent senior health professional who leads on several national health initiatives.

5.9 The Fostering Panel Adviser holds a key role and this is fulfilled by a Senior practitioner in the Fostering Service.

- 5.10 The Foster Panel considers all new applications to foster and reviews every foster carer on an annual basis. The panel then makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who has the final decision.
- 5.11 The Statutory Agency Decision Maker, is the Director of Children's Social Care who consults the Service Manager - Fostering; Panel Chair and the Fostering Panel Professional Advisor as and when necessary.
- 5.12 The Lewisham Fostering Panel was meeting monthly on dates agreed in advance but it has been necessary for the Fostering Panel to meet twice a month due to the high numbers of applicants which need to be considered. There is the flexibility to call meetings over and above the pre-arranged dates by agreement with the Fostering Panel Members.

5.13 De-Registrations & Resignations

- 5.13.1 During 2013-2014 only 1 foster carer was de-registered and 4 foster carers households resigned in August 2012.

5.14 Table of Allegations

	Allegations	Complaints	Serious Cause for Concern
2008-09	8	1	0
2009 -10	6	0	0
2010-11	7	1	5
2011-12	4	0	3
2012-13	7	0	5
2013-14	14	1	6

- 5.14.1 There were 14 allegations made against Lewisham Foster Carers, 4 of these resulted in Section 47 investigations. Two of the Section 47 allegations were non accidental injuries, which resulted in no further action taken by the Police. One was about rough handling of a baby and one was of an alleged physical assault, both were concluded to be unsubstantiated.
- 5.14.2 1 complaint was made by a Team Manager because a young person was left unsupervised at an fostering event. This was unsubstantiated, with no further action.
- 5.14.3 We had a higher number of allegations from the previous years. This could partially be a result of the fact that we have 36.5% more carers. However, we have audited every allegation and only 1 of the 14 has resulted in our needing to take further action. Most of the allegations were resolved within stage 1 timescale of 20 working days.

6. Financial implications

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 Local Authorities exercise Social Services functions as required by the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970. Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide appropriate services for children whom they look after.

8. Equalities Legislation

8.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

8.2 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

8.3 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

8.4 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>

- 8.5 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:
1. The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
 2. Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
 3. Engagement and the equality duty
 4. Equality objectives and the equality duty
 5. Equality information and the equality duty
- 8.6 The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

9. Crime and Disorder Implications

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

10. Equalities Implications

- 10.1 The work of the Fostering Service contributes to the achievement of the Council's priority relating to the 'protection of children.' Equality & Diversity has been incorporated into the Statement of Purpose and is updated as part of the regular review of the Statement of Purpose.

11. Environmental Implications

- 11.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides – My Guide to Foster Care inform children, young people, Lewisham foster carers and prospective foster carers of what they can expect from the Lewisham Fostering Service. For adults, this supplements the Foster Carer Handbook, which gives more detail of expectations, policies and procedures governing the direct care of Looked After Children.
- 12.2 These documents ensure that children, their parents, foster carers, professionals are clear about the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and what services and facilities it provides. The Fostering Service is required to meet the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose.
- 12.3 The Lewisham Statement of Purpose and Children's Guides are reviewed and updated annually.

Background Papers

None.

Appendix 1 - Fostering Statement of Purpose

Appendix 2 - Children's Guide for under 11 years old.

Appendix 3 - Lewisham Young People's Guide for over 11 years old.

If there are any queries on this report, please contact Ian Smith on 0208 3148140.