



4th May 2004

Report to the City Council

Aspects of the Internal Fostering Process

Further copies of this report can be obtained from:

Scrutiny Support Officer: Megan Montgomery

☎: 0121 303 1732

E-mail: megan.montgomery@birmingham.gov.uk

Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from
www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Contents

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1: | Summary | 3 |
| 2: | Summary of Recommendations | 4 |
| 3: | Introduction | 6 |
| | 3.1 Reason for Review | 6 |
| | 3.2 Terms of Reference | 6 |
| | 3.3 Membership | 7 |
| 4: | Methodology | 8 |
| | 4.1 Introduction | 8 |
| | 4.2 Recruitment of Foster Parents | 8 |
| | 4.3 Training and Assessment | 9 |
| | 4.4 Approval by Adoption and Fostering Panel | 9 |
| | 4.5 Retention of Foster Carers | 9 |
| | 4.6 Kinship Care | 9 |
| 5: | Recruitment & Approval | 10 |
| | 5.1 Introduction | 10 |
| | 5.2 Advertising | 10 |
| | 5.3 Criminal Records Bureau Checks | 11 |
| | 5.4 Adoption and Fostering Panels | 11 |
| 6: | Training and Retention | 13 |
| | 6.1 Training of Foster Carers | 13 |
| | 6.2 Retention of Foster Carers | 13 |
| | 6.3 Staff Training and Development | 14 |
| | 6.4 Staffing Issues | 14 |
| 7: | Support for Foster Carers | 15 |
| | 7.1 Payments to Foster Carers | 15 |
| | 7.2 Other Support | 17 |
| | 7.3 Collaborative Working Arrangements | 18 |
| 8: | Kinship Care | 19 |
| 9: | Conclusions and Recommendations | 21 |
| | 9.1 Conclusions | 21 |
| | 9.2 Recommendations for the City Council | 22 |
| | 9.3 Recommendations Already Actioned | 23 |
| | 9.4 Issues referred to the Review Process for Children Looked After Scrutiny Review Group | 25 |
| | Appendix 1: Proposed Review by the Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee | 26 |
| | Appendix 2: Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team Draft Marketing Plan 2003 | 27 |
| | Appendix 3: The training and assessment of prospective foster carers | 45 |
| | Appendix 4: Business Process Review of Recruitment & Assessment of Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents | 49 |
| | Appendix 5: Kinship Carers | 67 |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Preface:

Councillor Sue Anderson

Chair, Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Looked After Children are children who are being cared for by the Local Authority, either in foster care or in children's homes. These children have varied and complex needs and come from diverse backgrounds. For various reasons they are unable to live with their own parents.

As a result of the report from the Social Services Inspectorate in 2001, significant service changes were implemented in order to improve outcomes for children. The objective of this review is to examine the internal fostering process to establish whether these service changes have resulted in the desired improved outcomes and to make recommendations that will strengthen this service in order to ensure children in foster care are given the best possible present and future.

The review examined the quality and success of recruitment and retention of foster carers. They are a vital resource who the Directorate needs to adequately train, support and value. Timely and diverse placements are key to ensuring the best outcome for our children and foster carers are essential for this. So to are robust and efficient procedures, together with the availability of management information systems to ensure those procedures are effective. All these points were examined during the course of the review.

Fostering panels play a vital role in the decision making process ensuring that matching considerations have been fully explored and that the process is timely and sound. They have an important scrutiny role.

In addition to the eleven recommendations made in this review, a further five suggestions for improvement were identified, with the changes in practice and procedure adopted and acted upon immediately without waiting for the review to be completed.

I would like to thank members of the committee for dedicating their time to the review. Officers gave time, support, commitment and time and I also thank them. Together they have ensured that the review is robust and that when the recommendations are implemented the service will improve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Anderson".



Aspects of Internal Fostering

1: Summary

- 1.1 In May 2003, the Social Care Overview and Scrutiny (O & S) Committee agreed to undertake a review of some aspects of the internal fostering process. The purpose of the Review was to determine whether the service changes made since the 2001 inspection of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) had improved outcomes for children. It was anticipated that this review would be undertaken alongside the National Care Standards Commission Inspection of Birmingham City Council Fostering Services. The specific objectives of the Review were restricted to evaluating the process of recruitment of foster carers; the timeliness and diversity of placements and the availability of management information that would assist Birmingham City Council in meeting the nationally required performance indicators as well as locally determined indicators.
- 1.2 The Review Group considered the operation of fostering panels and the decision-making processes relating to the approval of foster carers and matching with Children Looked After.
- 1.3 Finally the Group was charged with identifying any gaps and shortfalls that mitigated against the improvement of the fostering service.
- 1.4 The identified outcomes for the Review were to ensure a positive outcome for the child and that he or she would be placed in an appropriate placement that met the individual needs of the child; that the service is timely, efficient and effective; and that the number and type of foster placements available are able to meet the Council's commissioning requirements.
- 1.5 During the work, the Group identified a number of actions which, with Officers' agreement, were taken immediately to make quick improvements to the service. There were also issues which were passed on to the related scrutiny work on the Review Process for Children Looked After.
- 1.6 Finally the small number of recommendations to the City Council are aimed at speeding up the recruitment of foster carers, and retaining more by taking further measures to support them.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

2: Summary of Recommendations

| | Recommendation | Responsibility | Completion Date |
|----|---|--|------------------------|
| R1 | That foster care recruitment should be targeted at placements fitting the profile of the children and young people making up Birmingham's Looked After Children population and that better use be made of existing particular networks. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | May 2004 |
| R2 | That further investigations be carried out as to the feasibility of reducing the recruitment process, from foster carers' initial enquiry to approval by panel, to 4 months. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | November 2004 |
| R3 | That procedures be established to deliver timely Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for prospective foster carers and for kinship carers' CRB checks to be fully completed within 5 days. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | August 2004 |
| R4 | That an improved post approval training programme be commissioned for foster carers as part of an overall support package to improve retention and meet standards. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | June 2004 |
| R5 | That consideration be given to a representative of the Adoption and Fostering Team and another for children in foster care serving on the Corporate Parenting Group. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | May 2004 |
| R6 | That foster panels receive regular feedback on actions taken and outcomes of "notes of concerns" they issue. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | May 2004 |
| R7 | That a review of foster carers' maintenance allowances be commissioned with a view to enhanced payments comparable to other local authorities and national recommendations. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | July 2004 |
| R8 | That consideration be given to financial assistance to Carers for school uniforms for children under 11. | Cabinet Member, Social Care and Health | August 2004 |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| Recommendation | Responsibility | Completion Date |
|---|--|-----------------|
| R9 That the benefits of introducing a "Passport to Health" scheme for Children Looked After in Birmingham be explored. | Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health & Health | August 2004 |
| R10 That progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Social Care Overview and Scrutiny committee on a 6-monthly basis until completed. The first report should be made by October 2004. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | November 2004 |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

3: Introduction

3.1 Reason for Review

- 3.1.1 The 2001 inspection of Children's Services by the Social Services Inspectorate performance was not of the required standard and as a result contributed to Birmingham City Council being considered by Central Government as failing children. As a result of this inspection and a Best Value Review, significant changes were made to the structure and management of the Adoption and Fostering Services. Following the implementation of the new structure and the management tasks, the Social Care O&S Committee identified a targeted programme of Scrutiny Reviews to help improve performance. This review is one part of that programme.
- 3.1.2 At the time of proposing this review it was recognised that certain limitations would apply to the outcomes as they would be affected by the National Care Standards Commission Inspection of Fostering Services and by a second inspection of Children's Services by the Social Services Inspectorate. Both of these occurred during summer 2003.

3.2 Terms of Reference

- 3.2.1 In considering this review, it is helpful to have an understanding of the following definitions:
- Foster Care is either a temporary solution or a long term agreement until the child becomes an adult (18 years). Sometimes this is at the preference of the child who may not wish to be adopted and would prefer to retain the family name.
 - Kinship Foster Care relates to children fostered by relatives or persons who the child has a significant relationship with.
 - Adoption is permanent, resulting from a legal adoption order which is irreversible. This removes the parental responsibilities from the birth parents and awards them to the adoptive parents.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

- 3.2.2 The terms of reference were agreed by the Co-ordinating O&S Committee in July 2003 and are attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2.3 The first meeting of the Aspects of Internal Fostering Scrutiny Review Group was held on 4th August 2003. This scoping meeting agreed that the Group needed to concentrate on the process of foster carer recruitment from the point applicants made themselves known to the Directorate to their approval by a Fostering Panel as foster. The Group agreed to look at how this process was managed and to attempt to identify why so many potential foster carers do not complete the process. The Group also wished to enquire as to what happened to foster carers who were not accepted for whatever reason by Birmingham City Council and to look at the training, development and support provided to foster carers once they are approved and have children placed with them.
- 3.2.4 The Group recognised that it was necessary to ensure they looked at the needs of the child and the needs of the foster carers separately. In respect of foster carers the Group agreed to focus on recruitment, training and development, reasons for breakdown and support arrangements. In respect of children the review would look at planned and unplanned moves, reasons for the move, and support available to the child in placement.
- 3.2.5 It was also anticipated that the review would consider gaps identified by the Social Services Inspectorate if their report was available during the course of the review. However, the SSI reported late in the investigative process and the National Care Standards Commission report was not released before this Review was finalised.
- 3.2.6 The Group met between August 2003 and December 2003 and a final report presented to the Social Care O&S Committee in February 2004.
- 3.2.7 During the Review it became clear that a number of issues overlapped with a second Review into the Reviewing Process for Children Looked After.

3.3 Membership

- 3.3.1 The Review Group was chaired by Councillor Sue Anderson who was assisted by Councillors Margaret Byrne, Margaret Scrimshaw and Reg Corns. The Group was supported by Officers from the Directorate of Social Care and Health, Scrutiny Office and Committee Services.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Review Group concentrated on 5 areas. They were:

- 2 Recruitment;
- 3 Training and Assessment;
- 4 Approval by Panel;
- 5 Retention;
- 6 Kinship Care.

4.1.2 The Group specifically requested the attendance of certain Officers who were directly engaged in managing aspects of the services under review. Members' experience of serving on Adoption and Fostering Panels assisted the review and their understanding of the process enhanced the speed at which the Group could undertake its work.

4.2 Recruitment of Foster Parents

4.2.1 The Group looked at the format of the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment Pack, which was deemed to be informative and well presented. The Draft Marketing Plan for 2003 (Appendix 2) was also considered. This information was presented by the Team Manager of the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment Team who was questioned on various details of the documents. The Manager of the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment Team was accompanied by the Assistant Director for Children's Services and the Head of Children's Services, North who has the overall management responsibility for Adoption and Fostering Services.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

4.3 Training and Assessment

- 4.3.1 The Group received a paper detailing the staffing levels of the Training and Assessment Team, details of the process, preparation, training and performance target information. This paper is attached as Appendix 3 in this report. To assist the Group two Team Managers from Adoption and Fostering Services and the Training Co-ordinator for Social Services attended the meeting to answer detailed questions.

4.4 Approval by Adoption and Fostering Panel

- 4.4.1 The Business Process Review of Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents, produced in May 2003, was circulated to the Group and is attached to this report as Appendix 4. We focussed on the work of the Panels, the expectations of Panel Members and the accuracy and detail of information presented to Panels for consideration.

4.5 Retention of Foster Carers

- 4.5.1 The Group were assisted in the discussions of this by the Operation Manager for Fostering and Adoption Social Care and Health Directorate, by other officers from the Directorate of Social Care and Health and by Jane Cook, Chair of Birmingham Foster Care Association.

4.6 Kinship Care

- 4.6.1 The Group were provided with details of the Kinship Care Assessment Process which is attached as Appendix 5. The Team Manager for Kinship Care and other senior officers from the Social Care and Health Directorate attended this meeting to aid the Group in their investigation.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

5: Recruitment & Approval

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 The average time taken to assess Birmingham foster carers, from point of enquiry to their approval at Panel, is six months. Recent experience in Liverpool shows the recruitment process could be reduced to four months. A shorter process was welcomed by foster carers as many thought the current process too drawn out and overly bureaucratic. The Group considered further investigations should be made as to whether a similar assessment process could be used in Birmingham. (see Recommendation 2).

5.2 Advertising

- 5.2.1 The Group was impressed by the work undertaken on the mixed heritage campaign, which aims to increase the number of fosterers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, together with the range of ethnicities represented.
- 5.2.2 The Group considered how to widen the audience and ensure better targeting of prospective foster carers. The Group recommended that this could be achieved by advertising through the NHS, e.g. GPs' surgeries, clinics, etc; via the City's Health Partnership forum; and through a wider use of schools, community centres and neighbourhood offices. This was deemed to be appropriate to implement immediately.
- 5.2.3 The Group considered exploring the possibility of advertising in conjunction with council tax bill distribution. However, this is the same audience that *The Voice* reaches so the value may be negligible. Some of the generic advertising for foster carers was felt not to be cost effective. The Group concluded that the advertising funding should be targeted at particular placements matching the background of the child. (see Recommendation 1)
- 5.2.4 The Group also felt that attempts be made to establish better links with Job Centres to market fostering as a form of employment. A Scrutiny Support Officer researched this and reported to the Social Care O&S Committee that whilst there is no employment legislation



Aspects of Internal Fostering

or taxation issues regarding this, foster carers do not lose state benefits and that Job Centres do not therefore consider fostering to be employment.

5.3 Criminal Records Bureau Checks

- 5.3.1 The Group identified that pre-approval training does not currently begin until CRB checks are received, which inevitably delays the process. It was agreed that, as an immediate action, training and assessment of foster carers could proceed without having received a CRB check. Prospective applicants are requested to disclose any criminal record and experience indicates that the vast majority of applicants are very honest on this point.
- 5.3.2 All CRB checks are currently channelled through Social Care Personnel. This process contributes to delays. The Review Group proposed a maximum acceptable delay in the CRB check process of two weeks and that the role of Personnel in this process should be reviewed.
- 5.3.3 Fostering Network research suggests prospective foster carers are more likely to stay engaged in the process if their applications are not subject to bureaucratic delays. Research also shows that regular communication with the Directorate made prospective carers feel needed and respected.
- 5.3.4 The Group recognised that the timeliness of responding to initial enquires, the speed of the assessment process and the support mechanisms provided were crucial to securing an appropriate placement. In order to improve the service, the recruitment process needed to be speeded up. (see Recommendation 2).

5.4 Adoption and Fostering Panels

- 5.4.1 The Group acknowledged that Panels operate as a quality assurance mechanism in approving foster carers and in matching the child's needs. Panels can issue Notes of Concern if deemed appropriate. The Group wished to know if this was having any impact on improving performance. It was acknowledged that high turnover of staff was a factor that contributed to these concerns, however, the group were re-assured that when they issued Notes of Concern these were acted upon.
- 5.4.2 The Group were strongly of the view that each Panel should receive regular feedback on actions taken and outcomes of the Notes of Concern they issued. (see Recommendation 6)
- 5.4.3 Concerns were expressed that at times issues arose at Panel due to



Aspects of Internal Fostering

the child not being properly represented by experienced social workers particularly if the case was complex.

- 5.4.4 Issues and concerns arising at Panel meetings were felt to be caused by the high turnover of staff and inconsistency of performance management. The Group were advised that difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff are a national problem. This is being addressed by an intensive focus on recruitment and retention and a workforce planning strategy has been established. Concern was also expressed that the new Judicial Protocol placed extra pressure on Panels and Officers.
- 5.4.5 The Group considered that efforts should be made to ensure current resources were sufficient to meet the requirements of the Protocol, recent legislation and the standards of the NCSC. There are concerns that without adequate support, individual Panel Members and Officers may find it difficult to cope with the extra and lengthened Panels which have been introduced to meet these new requirements. The Group were advised that resources have been made available from the Choice Protects Grant to rectify this and has enabled additional panel meetings to be held.
- 5.4.6 The Group were of the opinion that Panels were generally efficiently arranged and managed and that they conducted their business in an effective manner.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

6: Training and Retention

6.1 Training of Foster Carers

- 6.1.1 The current pre-approval training programme, in which all foster carers participate, offers courses at various times to ensure accessibility. A minimum number of applicants is required to make a training course viable. The Review Group recommended that the possibility of joint training with other local authorities and agencies should be explored and the Scrutiny Link Officer gave details of grant assistance from the training support grant which may be available for this joint venture.
- 6.1.2 It was noted that foster carers particularly benefit from training concerning relationships between children and their birth families and the attitudes of parents towards children who become looked after. Understanding of the emotional issues that accompany the separation of children from their birth parents added strength to foster carers' ability to cope.

6.2 Retention of Foster Carers

- 6.2.1 It was acknowledged that foster carers did not see fostering as a 'job for life'. Research indicates that foster carers' family circumstances influence the timing and length of their fostering careers. It was also recognised that the complexity of needs exhibited by most Looked After Children put particular stress and strain on foster carers. There was a need to recognise that foster carers may only be able to offer service for a limited period after which their energies and commitment diminish. It was agreed that this should be seen as part of a natural process and not necessarily as a sign any dissatisfaction with the service.
- 6.2.2 The issue of ongoing post-approval training was also seen as an important element in retention of existing foster carers. The Directorate's present lack of provision was noted as unhelpful by the Birmingham Foster Carers Association, but negotiations with the Association are underway, with the aim of establishing post approval training and an NVQ programme for foster carers. (see Recommendation 4).



Aspects of Internal Fostering

6.3 Staff Training and Development

6.3.1 Timely and accessible training and development of staff engaged in the recruitment and support of foster carers was recognised as being key to service improvement. This was particularly relevant with the new legislation and the requirements of the National Care Standards Commission to ensure staffs' skills and knowledge were up-to-date. The Scrutiny Link Officer informed the Group that the training needs of this group will be met within the training programme 2004-05.

6.3.2 Improved training and support and the quality and consistency of performance were being addressed by:

- more effective business planning and performance management frameworks;
- better use of the training support grant;
- a comprehensive training programme for 2004/5;
- launch of a quality assurance matrix tool in November 2004.

The Social Care O&S Committee received full reports on all these items during the course of this review.

6.3.3 Concerns were raised by the recruitment team regarding the development of the CHARMS System and availability of administrative support to the social work team. The Group recognised that the system was relatively new (installed in July 2003). However, they deemed speedy development to be key to the effective management of data to inform marketing strategies and requested that consideration be given as an immediate action to dedicated support and training over the initial few months.

6.4 Staffing Issues

6.4.1 The Group recognised that the increase in the volume and complexity of the work of the Kinship Care Team and the introduction of all day panels had resource implications for the Adoption and Fostering Panel Team. The Group therefore recommended that consideration be given to providing additional resources for the purpose of long-term budget planning requirements.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

7: Support for Foster Carers

7.1 Payments to Foster Carers

7.1.1 The table below identifies local authority payments to foster carers by selected local authorities from the Core Cities and the West Midlands, together with the Fostering Network recommended foster care allowances. Carers provided by external agencies are far more expensive so it is imperative for the Directorate to recruit and develop its own foster carers.

| | Maintenance | | | | Fee |
|-------------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|---------|---|
| | 0-5 yrs | 5-10 yrs | 11-15 yrs | 16+ | |
| Birmingham 2003 | £72.59 | £82.74 | £102.97 | £130.06 | £56.00-£207.34 (£350 for remand under consideration) |
| Manchester and Dudley 2002 | £103.67 | £118.09 | £147.00 | £187.60 | £153.00-237.60 (extra for NVQ) |
| Leeds 2002 | £63.55 | £78.90 | £98.15 | £127.20 | £226.55-£524.00 |
| Newcastle 2002 | £88.48 | £109.90 | £136.70 | £177.03 | £50.00-120.00 |
| Sandwell | £82.81 | £94.38 | £117.46 | £149.84 | £37.00-£318.20 |
| Fostering Network recommended | £103.67 | £118.09 | £147.00 | £187.60 | |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

7.1.2 The next table shows in more detail the Fostering Network recommended foster care allowances, outside London, for 2004.

| Age | Recommended allowance per week (£) | Gross weekly amount | Annual amount (£) | Plus extra allowances to be given out at relevant times |
|-------|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---|
| 0-4 | 108.49 | 116.84 | 6074.44 | 2 weeks holiday |
| 5-10 | 123.58 | 133.09 | 6,920.48 | 1 week Christmas |
| 11-15 | 153.84 | 165.67 | 8,615.04 | Religious festival |
| 16+ | 191.37 | 206.09 | 10,716.72 | 1 week birthday |

7.1.3 Maintenance is an allowance to cover the costs of caring for each child. It is payable to the carer for each child they care for. Fees are also payable to carers based on their skills and abilities, to reflect the care they provide.

7.1.4 As the tables indicate, Birmingham City Council's payments are lower than those paid by neighbouring authorities and those recommended by Fostering Network. A review of current maintenance and fee payments is needed to ensure that they appropriately recognise the skills of the foster carer and the complexity of the fostering task. It is also necessary to ensure that they are compatible with other West Midland Authorities so Birmingham remains an attractive employer for foster carers. This would aid recruitment and retention. Preliminary costings have identified an approximate annual budget increase of £1 million would be required. (see Recommendation 7).

7.1.5 The Group discussed the possibility of financial support for school uniforms for carers of children under 11 to assist with the cost. Currently no grants are available and most Birmingham primary schools have school uniform. Although the Group noted that they were moving outside their review scope, they believed this should be considered in budget setting proposals for 2004/05. (see Recommendation 8).



Aspects of Internal Fostering

7.2 Other Support

- 7.2.1 A representative from Birmingham Foster Care Association was invited to explore, with the Review Group, the relationship between the foster carers and the Social Care and Health Directorate. It was recognised that improvements had been made within the last two years and fosterers' experience was more positive. In particular, the fact that all foster carers are now allocated a supervising social worker from within the fostering service and are supported within functional teams was appreciated. A number of issues were raised which fell within the remit of the Children Looked After Scrutiny Review Group and these are detailed in Section 12.
- 7.2.2 There remain a number of issues that cause concern to the Group. These included the fact that statutory visits were not always carried out and that foster carers often perceive the response from area teams as 'poor' and 'not supportive'. There was also concern about the timing and notification of statutory reviews to foster carers and the Review Group passed these concerns on to the Children Looked After Review Group for consideration.
- 7.2.3 It was noted that support to foster carers from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was poor and that a number of area social workers appeared not to fully understand their role as link social worker for the child. The Group were informed that Birmingham has two separate CAMHS, one operated by the NHS and one operated by the City Council. Evidence presented to the panel was in respect of both services. The Group were pleased to learn that the new Child and Adolescent Mental Health Specific Grant would enable the City to establish CAMHS provision for Adoption and Fostering services. These should come on stream during 2003/04.
- 7.2.4 The health needs of children were still not given enough priority and the Group were impressed by the 'Passport to Health' which is currently in use in Southampton. This was developed by the National Foster Care Association and the passport includes a list of activities which the foster carers can authorise for example school trips, vaccinations, medical treatment, etc. It was agreed that Birmingham Looked After Children would benefit from its implementation, particularly as it and the group recommended that this process could be explored further with the NHS. (see Recommendation 9).



Aspects of Internal Fostering

7.3 Collaborative Working Arrangements

- 7.3.1 The Review Group recognised the work of the Development Forum and noted that continual support was necessary for it. The forum meets bi-monthly and explores issues relating to fostering. Their aim is to improve partnership working and services to carers and children. Representatives include the Birmingham Foster Carers Association, Fostering Operations Manager, Team Managers from Temporary Fostering, Recruitment and Kinship; the Assistant Head of Child Protection/Review and the Area Head of Children's Service (Heart of Birmingham)
- 7.3.2 The re-launch of the Children's Pledge and the new Corporate Parenting Group chaired by the Chief Executive were discussed. The Group requested consideration be given to the inclusion of a representative of children in foster care and of an Adoption and Fostering representative to be represented on this group as well as children in residential care. The Group felt that again, although this was outside the review's scope, a request could be made. (see Recommendation 5).



Aspects of Internal Fostering

8: Kinship Care

- 8.1 The Review Group supports the use of relatives as foster carers. The number of kinship carers in Birmingham is increasing and it was recognised that this puts pressure on the existing Kinship Care Team. The Group requested that Senior Managers monitor this and ensure that the number of children placed with relatives was not affected by insufficient resources.
- 8.2 During the Group's examination of kinship care arrangements it was identified that a review is needed of current policies. In particular, emergency placements made by Area Teams and Emergency Duty Teams occur without proper assessment of the appropriateness of the placement or the relatives' ability to care for the child.
- 8.3 The Kinship Care Team are not always immediately aware of placements as they do not become involved until after the emergency placement had been made and the assessment carried out. Up to that point cases are dealt with by the area teams and generally no longer-term discussions are held. It was accepted that it might be possible to do more at the outset to make kinship carers aware of the type of support which they could expect to receive. It was noted that the Kinship Care Team's involvement often coincided with a time of sadness or distress for the family and kinship carers may either want the child or feel that they had a responsibility to take the child. Their motivation for taking the child was an important factor and had a huge impact on outcomes.
- 8.4 The assessment procedure in respect of all emergency placements should be completed within the six-week timescale. Delays in carrying out assessments could result in a child being put at risk through remaining in an unsafe or inappropriate placement.
- 8.5 The Group was of the opinion that clear guidelines should be established for carrying out assessments and that mechanisms should be put in place to ensure compliance with those guidelines. Members also highlighted the need for a fast track process which would enable the assessment and approval procedures to be carried out within six weeks and for immediate action to be taken to remove the child from the temporary placement in the event of an unsatisfactory CRB check being received.
- 8.6 It was agreed to refer the issues raised in relation to emergency placements, including the assessment process to the Children Looked After Review Group for examination as part of that review.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

- 8.7 The Review Group recommended that CRB checks for kinship carers should be completed within 5 days. (see Recommendation 3)
- 8.8 In terms of ongoing support for kinship carers, it was felt that the information sessions for carers were extremely useful for highlighting a range of issues. The information sessions often served to establish an ongoing dialogue and it was felt that these sessions, particularly those held on Saturday mornings should continue.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

9: Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Conclusions

- 9.1.1 Our scrutiny was limited by the inspections undertaken by the National Care Standards Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate. However, the Scrutiny process provided an opportunity to examine in close detail some of the aspects of recruitment, training and retention of foster carers within the City. Our aim of course was to make recommendations which will improve the performance of the Internal Fostering Service.
- 9.1.2 When we reviewed our findings to draft recommendations, then we found the issues fell into three categories:
- recommendations for change which require City Council approval;
 - actions which Members and Officers could agree should be implemented immediately rather than awaiting the outcome of the review;
 - issues which fell more properly within the remit of the scrutiny work into the Review Process for Children Looked After.
- 9.1.3 It is anticipated that the outcomes of the Review Process for Children Looked After Scrutiny Review and the Aspects of Internal Fostering Scrutiny Review will assist the Social Care & Health Directorate in identifying a management action plan for the improvement of services following receipt of the National Care Standards Commission Inspection of Fostering Services and Department of Health Social Services Inspection for Children's Services. The Group noted that the action plans arriving from these four different reviews should be brought together in one amalgamated action plan for the directorate to ensure that no issues are lost and all recommendations are prioritised, action taken and timescales set for improvements.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

9.2 Recommendations for the City Council

9.2.1 Our priorities were to find ways of speeding up the recruitment process, and then to identify ways of retaining more foster parents through giving practical support, both financial and personal.

9.2.2 Our first three recommendations are therefore aimed at improving the recruitment process:

| | Recommendation | Responsibility | Completion Date |
|----|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| R1 | That foster care recruitment should be targeted at placements fitting the profile of the children and young people making up Birmingham's Looked After Children population and that better use be made of existing particular networks. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | May 2004 |
| R2 | That further investigations be carried out as to the feasibility of reducing the recruitment process, from foster carers' initial enquiry to approval by panel, to 4 months. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | November 2004 |
| R3 | That procedures be established to deliver timely Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for prospective foster carers and for kinship carers' CRB checks to be fully completed within 5 days. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | August 2004 |

9.2.3 The remainder deal with the support issues, firstly training and development, and then moving on to financial issues. The final recommendation, as usual with scrutiny reports, is to allow tracking of the implementation of whatever the City Council decides.

| | Recommendation | Responsibility | Completion Date |
|----|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| R4 | That an improved post approval training programme be commissioned for foster carers as part of an overall support package to improve retention and meet standards. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | June 2004 |
| R5 | That consideration be given to a representative of the Adoption and Fostering Team and another for children in foster care serving on the Corporate Parenting Group. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | May 2004 |
| R6 | That foster panels receive regular feedback on actions taken and outcomes of "notes of concerns" they issue. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | May 2004 |
| R7 | That a review of foster carers' maintenance allowances be commissioned with a view to enhanced payments comparable to other local authorities and national recommendations. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | July 2004 |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| Recommendation | Responsibility | Completion Date | |
|----------------|---|--|---------------|
| R8 | That consideration be given to financial assistance to Carers for school uniforms for children under 11. | Cabinet Member, Social Care and Health | August 2004 |
| R9 | That the benefits of introducing a "Passport to Health" scheme for Children Looked After in Birmingham be explored. | Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health & Health | August 2004 |
| R10 | That progress towards achievement of these recommendations should be reported to the Social Care Overview and Scrutiny committee on a 6-monthly basis until completed. The first report should be made by October 2004. | Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health | November 2004 |

9.3 Recommendations Already Actioned

- 9.3.1 Whilst undertaking this Scrutiny Review, the Chairperson and the Review Group noted that a considerable amount of work had already been carried out in relation to performance improvement. The Review Group recognised that there are enthusiastic and committed staff and good areas of practice particularly around support to carers and to panel processes. This review focused on gaps and how to add value by ensuring processes are more effective and timely.
- 9.3.2 During the review Members and Officers agreed a number of actions to improve services. These were implemented immediately rather than awaiting the outcome of the review. These were:

| Recommendation | Progress to date |
|---|--|
| That the pre-approval process commence prior to receipt of a Criminal Records Bureau check. | Actioned January 2004. |
| That the maximum delay in the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) process should be two weeks and if this meant reviewing the role of Personnel in the | Actioned October 2004. Additional internal resources were temporarily deployed to clear the backlog of CRB. A monitoring procedure has been implemented. Discussions are underway with the CRB for Birmingham to participate in the |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>process then this ought to be implemented.</p> | <p>electronic CRB application pilot.</p> |
| <p>That additional forums be identified to widen the audience and ensure better targeting of prospective foster carers.</p> | <p>Progress to date: The marketing strategy has been launched and promotions officers appointed. The forums for advertising have been significantly widened to include health sites, schools, community centres and Neighbourhood Offices. The Chief Education Officer also personally wrote to all Head Teachers in Birmingham requesting them to promote foster carer literature.</p> |
| <p>That representation of children in care and of the Adoption and Fostering team be considered as part of the new Corporate Parenting Group, chaired by the Chief Executive.</p> | <p>This has been addressed by the new Corporate Parenting Group.</p> |
| <p>That consideration be given to providing dedicated administrative support and training during the implementation of the Computing Help Adoption Records Management System (CHARMS) system. (5.11)</p> | <p>A business proposal was agreed with the Information Systems Group in early December 2003, resulting in resources being seconded to fast track implement and training support on the CHARMS system for the recruitment team.</p> |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

9.4 Issues referred to the Review Process for Children Looked After Scrutiny Review Group

- 9.4.1 During the Review it became clear that a number of issues overlapped with the above Scrutiny Review. The following issues were referred to that Review Group on the understanding that members of this Group would be invited to attend when they were discussed.
- 9.4.2 The role of the Reviewing Officers needs to be strengthened to enable them to take appropriate action in order to meet the needs of the child following reviews.
- 9.4.3 Carers were not always given sufficient notification of review meetings. At present, invitations were sent out by the area staff and this task would perhaps be more appropriately performed by the review teams.
- 9.4.4 It was important to ensure that representatives of all of the relevant agencies, for example: parents; foster carers; and education and health workers, were invited to statutory review meetings. Review meetings should therefore be held at a time to suit all parties. Members felt it important to establish clear guidelines for carrying out reviews and to put in place mechanisms for ensuring compliance with those guidelines.
- 9.4.5 This Group also highlighted the need for monitoring of Kinship emergency placements to ensure these are carried out within six weeks and that immediate action is taken to remove the child in the event of an unsatisfactory CRB check being received.
- 9.4.6 It is anticipated that the outcomes of these two reviews - the Review Process for Children Looked After Scrutiny Review and the Aspects of Internal Fostering Scrutiny Review - will assist the Social Care & Health Directorate in identifying a management action plan for the improvement of services following receipt of the National Care Standards Commission Inspection of Fostering Services and Department of Health Social Services Inspection for Children's Services. The Group noted that the action plans arriving from these four different reviews should be brought together in one amalgamated action plan for the directorate to ensure that no issues are lost and all recommendations are prioritised, action taken and timescales set for improvements.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Appendix 1: Proposed Review by the Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee

| | |
|---|--|
| A: Subject of review: | Aspects of the Internal Fostering Process |
| B: Reason for review: | In context of NCSC inspection and review of service underway to determine best configuration of service within new structure, ascertain whether the service changes made since 2001 Children's Inspection have improved outcomes for children. |
| C: Objectives of review, including outcomes: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the process of recruitment of new foster carers, including, timeliness, diversity of placements available to meet needs, management information available to monitor the process • Review the operation of Fostering Panels and decision making processes • Identify any gaps and shortfalls with proposals to improve service • Outcomes • To ensure : • There is a positive outcome for the child and he or she is placed in an appropriate placement that meets their individual needs • The service is timely, efficient and effective • The number and type of foster placements available meets the Council's commissioning requirements |
| D: Lead Officer: | Andrea Hickman and Helen French |
| E: Council departments expected to contribute: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, Sport and Leisure , and Social Care and Health |
| F: External organisations expected to contribute: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birmingham Foster Care Association • Health Services • National Children's Homes • Children's Engagement and Children's Rights Service • Foster Parents |
| G: Estimated number of working days required for review: | Members: |
| H: Anticipated completion date: | Officers: December 2003 |
| I: Anticipated call on Special Scrutiny Budget: | |

Signed:
Councillor
Chair,

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Aspects of Internal Fostering

**Appendix 2: Adoption &
Fostering Recruitment
Team
Draft Marketing Plan
2003**

A & F RECRUITMENT TEAM

DRAFT

MARKETING PLAN

2003

Based upon Draft
Written by Lynette Adjei April 2002
Updated to reflect current position and events

Vivien Meadows

24/03/2003



Aspects of Internal Fostering

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION & MISSION
2. CURRENT MARKET POSITION
 - 2.1 Service and Market Background
 - 2.2 Budget * Costings need to build into This plan
 - 2.3 SWOT Analysis
3. MARKETING OBJECTIVES
4. STRATEGY, TACTICS & IMPLEMENTATION
 - 4.1 Strategy
 - 4.1.1. Branding
 - 4.1.2. Service
 - 4.1.3. Budgetary
 - 4.1.4. Distribution
 - 4.1.5. Promotion
 - 4.1.6. Service Marketing
 - 4.2 Tactics and Implementation
5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION
6. SCHEMES OF WORK – General; New Campaign Devpt.
7. APPENDICES



Aspects of Internal Fostering

2. CURRENT MARKET POSITION

2.1 SERVICE AND MARKET BACKGROUND

- The Team achieved its enquiry target for a year in six months, and shortly after our first anniversary in October 2002 – 2,000 enquiries had been registered (September 2001 – October end October 2002).
- Recruitment Team is looking to exploit new areas of the Birmingham market-place with a repositioned product/service using a mix of direct marketing, joint promotional activity and e-marketing activity. The Team is concerned to target recruitment where it is required most.
- 2003 should see a concerted effort to research additional target markets for areas of particular need.
- Existing customers/carers will be the focus of relationship marketing activity designed to maintain optimum 2 way communication and improve awareness of departmental services and continued mutual support.
- New promotional angles will be tailored to meet the needs of relevant target audiences.
- The Shop has become much more a focus of our work than originally anticipated. This has both positive and creative impact as well as maintenance of at shop. A decision has been made to take advantage of the positive aspects by movement of office accommodation to re-locate in Ruskin Chambers above the shop.

2.1.1 SERVICES

Recruitment, Assessment, Training and Support Service-
See Appendix – A & F Organisational Chart with notes outlining team responsibilities

Partnerships

BFCA

BAAF

Fostering Network

A new partnership is being made with the Job Centres

Health Authorities

Enquiry Summary

See Appendix – Statistical Analysis



Aspects of Internal Fostering

2.1.2 Market

| MARKET | AGE/BACKGROUND/ORIENTATION | BENEFIT |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Couples without children | | |
| Couples with children | | |
| Single Parents | | |
| Single people without children | | |
| Empty nesters | | |

2.2 BUDGET

£3,000 per individual campaign

Total advertising budget of £50,950 in 2002/2003,
2003 / 4 Budget level not known yet



Aspects of Internal Fostering

SWOT ANALYSIS

INTERNAL

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|--|
| <p>Resent achievement of 12 month target in 6 months – 2,000 in 13 months Dedicated and Skilled Staff Substantial Carer Database High loyalty from existing carers High quality service with good levels of satisfaction Departmental ethos – putting the child first Service efficiency Improving reputation of the service Networks - BFCA, BAAF, Fostering Network Support and acceptance of the need to recruit carers from other council departments e.g. Corporate Promotions Recruitment Video New Database – teething problems</p> | <p>Marketing – lack of cohesion to some aspects of marketing planning, monitoring and evaluation Inadequately developed database, but being replaced by CHARMS system Understaffed and stressed workforce in Recruitment and Assessment teams – which impacts on the service as a whole Limited resources Practical delays in making interactive presentations happen at Information Meeting</p> |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| <p>Gaps in market for specific targeted activity, e.g. Yardley Web and E-commerce Provision of comprehensive and user-friendly database (CHARMS) Develop relationships with existing carers to increase their involvement in recruitment Identify new partners Improve our profile – awareness Neighbouring LA's Standards Legislation – good standards</p> | <p>Negative publicity re the department Negative publicity re treatment of carers in general Suppliers – efficiency, systems, flair, current department design and print facilities Distributors – systems, efficiency Customers – Carers continued loyalty Other external factors – Governmental legislation re Adoption and Fostering, budget allocations for Local Government, Government and Audit Commission Reports Difficulties in keeping abreast of developments in IT</p> |

EXTERNAL

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|--|---|
| <p>CRB checks will need to be taken on by Adoption and Fostering rather than Personnel</p> | <p>Competitors FCA, Independent Agencies, neighbouring LA's</p> |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

3. MARKETING OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 To increase the profile of the work of the A & F Recruitment Team by holding a significant event in 2003 and obtaining significant press coverage in the local and regional press.
- 3.2 To increase annual enquiries by ??% in 2003 as prescribed in the departmental objectives.
- 3.3 To increase the number of visitors to The Shop by 25% in 2003, as prescribed in the departmental objectives.
- 3.4 To achieve a minimum of 200 hits on the Team's Website in 2003
To maintain level of enquiries.

National Competition for campaign / regional image



Aspects of Internal Fostering

4. STRATEGY, TACTICS & IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Strategy

4.1.1. Branding Strategy

We have made use of successful over the last twelve months which is easily recognisable and identified as Birmingham Fostering and Adoption.

The Recruitment Team will reinforce the current brand identity by establishing partnerships with organisations which have relationships with promoting adoption and fostering services in the West Midlands and nationally.

It is planned in January 2004 to create new branding with a fresh image – this will be funded from Choice Protects.

4.1.2 Service Strategy

The Recruitment Team will continue as a pro-active supplier of reliable and accessible information through The Shop, through community networking and through promotional activity.

- Cost-effective and contemporary publicity material will be used
- Contemporary layout and design will be applied as appropriate
- The Recruitment Team will continue the winning formula of providing a flexibility of service, thus maintaining an invaluable support mechanism for existing and prospective Carers throughout the region
- New ideas for campaigns will be constantly sought
- Training and professional development of all team members needs to be addressed on a more regular basis
- Research will be carried out to see how target markets will react to new strategies

4.1.3 Budgetary Strategy

Cost and Comparisons

The team needs to cover the costs of marketing our services within the context of LA provision. We need to measure our performance against that of similar departments regionally and nationally



Aspects of Internal Fostering

wherever possible



Aspects of Internal Fostering

4.1.4 Distribution Strategy (Place)

The team needs to maximise existing channels of distribution, to use improved direct marketing techniques to generate enquiry volume, to reinforce relationships with our existing Carers and networkers and to develop new channels of distribution

The A & F Recruitment Team Online - The team needs to develop and maintain its website providing information and enabling on-line requests for information, comments etc.

A 'Distribution' database needs to be regularly maintained. This has been assisted by the introducing of a courier to major distribution points e.g. Primary Care Trust for all GP surgeries, health clinics etc in city

4.1.2. Promotional Strategy

Corporate Image

Review when appropriate Logo: corporate colours, etc.

Consistency needs to be established, understood by all and maintained throughout the organisation for administrative (stationery, ink stamps, reception, etc) and PR functions

Review and Development of Promotional 'Goodies' range

Establishment of a corporate 'style sheet'

Administration support to be supplied to Promotions Officer, particularly where support for distribution is required

E-Marketing and E-Commerce

Development of Internet and Intranet sites

Internet - The Recruitment Team Online

As marketing practice evolves in all sectors, the key and probably most prominent tool being developed is that of the internet. The Recruitment Team has an operational site that has been up-dated in line with the rest of the Birmingham City Council site of which it is a part

The site has been up-dated with current information pack. The on-going appearance of the site that is exciting, accessible, immediately engaging, comprehensive and well maintained. It should be a positive reflection of a contemporary, forward-thinking, energised team. The site has been set up by Caroline Hobbs and work is ongoing.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Intranet

In light of the locations from which members of staff of the Recruitment Team work, it would be advantageous to extend the use of the Council's existing facility – Lotus Notes throughout the team or to develop a facility associated with our web-site. This would be a secure facility with remote access providing all authorised staff and associates with up to date accurate and good quality information and organisational facilities.

Managerial and Administrative Bulletins; Policy Documents; Staff News and Circulars; Organisational/Staff Diary; Marketing Bay – Press Coverage, Press Releases, Campaign Prompts, ClipArt, Marketing Clips etc; Personnel – facilities such as booking Annual Leave through facility ... and much more

Press and PR

Corporate Profile – Coverage of event in 2003 (*See Appendix 4 – Gala Plan*) to include:

- PR Opportunities leading up to the event
- Presence in Adoption/Fostering Press and the Community/Social Work Press
- Networking through A & F Department, team members, existing Carers, etc.
- Press coverage of various external events (House Photographer(s))
- Competitions
- Alertness to PR angles – opportunities – e.g. collaborations
- Seasonal opportunities

Advertising

- Ensure systems are in place to measure responses
 - Family Press – Regular ads and one-off adds – e.g. Unreel Magazine, Doctors' surgeries, etc
 - Web -
 - A & F site
 - Subscriptions to search engines
 - Links to and from associated sites
 - Reciprocal arrangements
 - Distribution of posters via Council networks – Leisure, Neighbourhood Offices, Colleges etc and external distribution networks – religious organisations
- ◆ Standard Mono colour ads for each campaign to be ready



Aspects of Internal Fostering

for use in printed media, web ads and as e-mail attachments for staff

- ◆ Link advertising with Press activity – interviews etc
- ◆ Inserts – target various conference packs, etc
- ◆ Events – programme ads, poster displays (Birmingham Youth Games, etc)

Marketing through our services and products

- ◆ Seek opportunities to promote relevant services and products within our own activity: Course/Training Delegate Packs
- ◆ Publications – e.g. Articles in Inner Voice
- ◆ E-Mail attachments and other correspondence (graphics, ads, etc)
- ◆ Networking – self promotion and promotion of team's services

Service Promotion

The Shop:

Signage: This is crucial to the future development of The Shop as a resource. Its position, behind a fairly substantial bus stop, The Shop needs a sign that is at right angles to the building. This will require planning permission and advice is being sought prior to a sign writer being commissioned to undertake the work

Campaigns

Development process of campaigns needs to be streamlined, deadlines set and areas of responsibility clearly determined

Direct Mail

- ◆ Ensure good lead in period, code each mailing
- ◆ Buy into external mailings
- ◆ Mail to: past carers/enquirers/professional associates, community organisations, educational institutions, etc.
- ◆ Follow-up Calls if appropriate

Print

- ◆ Current practice must be continued – of thorough vetting designs and quality of finished print before any distribution takes place
- ◆ Currently produced on a regular basis: Corporate and



Aspects of Internal Fostering

campaign literature (City Dressing, Standard posters and flyers)

- ◆ Profile Books have been re-established in conjunction with the Family Finding Teams and updated about three times a year. For internal use only. This gives enquirers a real insight of children requiring adoption and long term fostering.

Collaborations

- ◆ BFCA – Various – On-going work on Remand Fostering to ensure strong foundations to future campaigns
- ◆ Fostering Network – good practice guidelines featuring the highlights of the work of ourselves and other authorities

Events and Exhibitions

- ◆ Historically, the team has endeavoured to have a presence at events at which various sections of the community can be targeted. In 2002, these have included Vaisakhi, Eid Mela and St Patrick's Day
- ◆ The Council's Discovery Day was markedly less successful than Marcus Garvey Day which occurred on the same day
- ◆ Consideration needs to be taken of the staffing implications for these events, as many of them take place outside the working week. Carers may be enlisted as volunteers to assist on these occasions. A volunteer is also being police checked prior to joining the team
- ◆ The team should also act on opportunities to exhibit when it is financially viable in terms of fees, expenses and staff time

4.1.3. Packaging strategy

Packaging is a crucial element of the team's marketing mix – to protect our service, to promote it and to distribute information about it.

In a highly competitive marketplace, where we are vying for



Aspects of Internal Fostering

the attention of people with many distractions, it may be prudent to consider design options outside the City Council to achieve maximum impact for some campaigns.

4.1.4. Service Marketing

People

Selection and Training - The team needs to continue to recruit the right people, provide them with the tools to do the job including training, and motivate them to stay committed to the team and its work

Internal Marketing - Management needs to actively promote a culture of service within the organisation through team meetings and a customer service strategy (*Appendix*). Management also needs to ensure that all staff and departmental colleagues are fully briefed on all marketing initiatives – this is probably best achieved through the use of Lotus Notes or possibly a more specifically designed intranet service, alongside more traditional methods such as meetings and e-mails in order to continue to present a professional image to customers.

All staff need to be conversant with the reason for an on-line presence, and need to understand the website.

Staff also need to be conversant with PowerPoint presentations

Presentations - The team members need to behave in a manner that reflects well on the department, and our service.

Customer Relationship Management - See separate plan for the development of a Customer Service Charter and strategy for implementation (*Appendix*). All staff who deal with the public must receive continual customer care update training and update sessions

Process

Management needs to consider strategies that will ensure that the entire team can deliver a consistent level of service to all customers at all times.

Physical Evidence



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Statistics

Training Certificates, Approval of carers
Placement of a child

4.2/3 Tactics & Implementation - See Campaign Timetables

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The following procedures/methods have been implemented/employed to varying degrees over the past months:

- Record all campaign activity – publicity, enquiries, trends against previous years etc.
- Code all direct mail and advertising
- Booking System – where/how did you hear about the service – give options on web or printed form/telephone enquiry
- Review and adjust campaigns as appropriate
- Conduct Market Research and Document Market Intelligence (very early stage)
- Maintain records of press coverage, advertising etc.
- Post Mortem team meetings on campaigns – suggesting ways forward
- Prepare quarterly Market Report including Expenditure and Interim Updates

| Date | Ongoing Practices | CAMPAIGNS |
|---------------|--|---|
| January 2003 | Developing partnerships (e.g., with Birmingham Foster Carers Association) Planning Reporting Customer Care Website maintenance Presence at community events | Siblings campaign: Long term fostering and adoption. This successful campaign has operated since late 2002. It still presents opportunities and is a source of ongoing enquiries Response: Medium-High |
| February 2003 | As above | Sibling campaign part 2. The original campaign which took place late 2002, was so |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | | <p>successful that it was further developed to focus on the need for temporary placements for brothers and sisters</p> <p>Response: High</p> <p>Publicity stall at Diwali event at Handsworth park.</p> <p>Response: High</p> |
|--|--|---|



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| Date | Ongoing Practices | CAMPAIGNS |
|-------------|--------------------------|---|
| March 2003 | As above | As above + Distribution of leaflets at St Patrick's Day festival held in City centre Response: Medium |
| April 2003 | As above | Recruitment planning for Teenage Fostering campaign launch |
| May 2003 | As above | Teenage Fostering campaign (slammed doors & back chat) literature produced May 12, Pallasades Shopping Centre: Teenage Fostering campaign launched by Cllr. McCorrie, cabinet member Response: High |
| June 2003 | As above | Teenage fostering campaign continues New promotions officer started Late June: Shared (respite) Care campaign for Children with Disabilities includes advertorial and advert in Evening Mail Response: Ongoing |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| | | |
|-----------|----------|--|
| July 2003 | As above | Shared (respite) Care campaign continues including TV Central news item Remand Leaflet produced (for a specific target audience) Early July: Publicity stall at One Stop Shopping Centre, over 3 day period Response: Ongoing |
|-----------|----------|--|



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| Date | Ongoing Practices | CAMPAIGNS |
|----------------|--------------------------|---|
| August 2003 | As above | <p>Possible plans for involvement in Summer City Council Events (to be confirmed)</p> <p>Recruitment planning for Children of Mixed Heritage campaign (Jane & Manjeet to be involved)</p> |
| September 2003 | As above | <p>Children of Mixed Heritage campaign continues</p> <p>Response:</p> |
| October 2003 | As above | <p>Children of Mixed Heritage campaign continues</p> <p>Reality of Adoption campaign (Gaynor & Jasmine to be involved)</p> <p>Response:</p> |
| November 2003 | As above | Reality of Adoption campaign continues |
| December 2003 | As above | Recruitment planning for Mother and Baby campaign (to be confirmed) |



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Appendix 3: The training and assessment of prospective foster carers

INFORMATION FOR SCRUTINY REVIEW ON ASPECTS OF INTERNAL FOSTERING SUB-COMMITTEE 25TH SEPTEMBER 2003

THE TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS AND ADOPTERS

1. THE TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT TEAM

- 1.1 The team currently consists of the equivalent of 10 full time social work posts, one full-time Training Co-ordinator post and one fulltime Team Manager post (job-shared). An additional fulltime social work post has recently been allocated to the team and is in the process of advert and recruitment.
- 1.2 Capacity of the team is augmented in two ways. Firstly, some Family Placement staff undertake some assessments in their own time. Second, some assessments are outsourced to independent workers. All foster care assessments are carried out by Departmental Family Placement staff.
- 1.3 The team is based at Pype Hayes Hall in Erdington. The team shares its administrative support with the Recruitment Team, now fully based at its city centre location.
- 1.4 The team's function is to provide Preparation Training and Assessment of all prospective foster carers and adopters (excluding kinship carers). Assessment of Inter-county adopters, stepparent adopters and specific carers for children known to them (e.g. temporary foster carers wanting to adopt a child in placement) are also the responsibility of this team.

2. THE PROCESS

- 2.1 Applicants received from Recruitment Team – post CRB check, screening (temporary fostering applicants only)(average 2 months from application).
- 2.2 Allocated to preparation group – applicants generally need notice of at least 6-8 weeks to arrange leave from work, childcare, avoid existing commitments e.g. holidays.
- 2.3 Preparation groups spread 5/6 days training over a 2-week period.
- 2.4 Following groups individual evaluations of applicants are compiled, which are carried forward into the assessment process. (completion within a week)
- 2.5 On completion of evaluations, applicants are allocated an assessing social worker. (1 week turnaround)
- 2.6 Initial contact to arrange the first home visit should be made with the applicant within a week of allocation.
- 2.7 The amount of input and time allocation to assessment may vary according to



Aspects of Internal Fostering

- complexity and availability of applicants. However, we work to a target completion time of three months.
- 2.8 On completion of the assessment, papers are forwarded to the Fostering Panel Team for allocation of a Panel date. Currently, this may take a minimum of 6 weeks.
- 2.9 Following approval, applicants' files are passed to the appropriate Support Team.
3. PREPARATION TRAINING
- 3.1 Approximately 20 courses are provided each year – of which 7 would be temporary fostering, 7 adoption, 3 long-term fostering, 3/4 children's groups. Additional groups are offered where demand is high and capacity allows. (c.f. attached programme 2003/2004)
- 3.2 Groups are provided both at weekends and evenings as well as on weekdays, in order to provide choice and flexibility.
- 3.3 Groups generally take place at Pype Hayes Hall. However, on occasion the venue may change to other areas of the city in order to provide some degree of choice.
- 3.4 Adults Groups consist of a five/six day programme run over a two-week period.
- 3.5 A minimum of 7 and a maximum of 16 applicants is normally required for a group to be viable.
- 3.6 Groups are facilitated by members of the team working alongside foster carer trainers and other contributors (adopters, area social workers etc)
- 3.7 The training courses are competency based, in line with National Standards
- 3.8 Birmingham piloted the Fostering Network competency based training pack (not yet published) and the team has augmented and adapted the materials for fostering and adoption groups. The team has developed its own materials for use with children and young people.
- 3.9 The training covers the basic competencies required for the task. The content of these courses:
 What is fostering about?
 Listening to Young people, Working together, Child development,
 Abuse and child protection, Managing challenging behaviour,
 Fostering and your family, Moving on.
- 3.10 All social workers in the team participate in the training programme. Whilst few have had the benefit of formal training in adult learning, they have developed their skills in delivering the training materials by observing and learning from the practice of more experienced colleagues in the team.
- 3.11 Following the conclusion of the groups the trainers complete detailed evaluation reports on each applicant, These are carried forward into the assessment process.
4. ASSESSMENT
- 4.1 Fostering and adoption are challenging and demanding tasks. Assessment is a complex process requiring the expertise to assess applicants' skills, the impact of their own experiences upon their potential competence and their capacity to learn and develop. All members of the household must be considered during assessment.
- 4.2 An assessment will consist on average of between 8 and 12 visits to the applicants. The number will depend upon the complexity of the family's circumstances. Additional time may be required if the assessment has to be carried out using an interpreter.
- 4.3 In addition, for the purpose of checking evidence of competence and factual information, the assessor will interview at least three referees, make contact with schools, employers and any other appropriate informants.
- 4.4 Visits are often weekly, but may be more frequent depending upon applicant



Aspects of Internal Fostering

availability and “work and thinking time” required between sessions. Between visits applicants will be given tasks to complete (evidence gathering, case scenarios). Applicants will be invited to complete certain sections of the assessment document themselves.

4.5 Assessments comprise a range of factual information, descriptive information and analytical discussion. Assessments are competence based and require significant supporting evidence to be provided in the applicants’ portfolio.

4.6 Some assessments will be completed within the target period of three months. Others may take longer.

5. TARGETS – PERFORMANCE

5.1 Assessments should be completed within a three months of allocation. Whilst this is sometimes achievable, complexity and other causes of delay may cause the timescales to be extended. Reasons for changes in timescale may include: delays in medical assessment, unavailability of applicant, assessor’s annual leave or sick leave, logistical problems with independent assessors, stage of professional development of assessor.

5.2 Full-time team assessors are likely to be carrying an average of five assessments at any one time, in various stages of completion. In addition, they are likely to deliver a training programme once every 8 weeks. Staffing difficulties (sickness/vacancies) inevitably increase this load.

5.3 Additional assessments (mainly adoption, inter-country adoption, step parent adoption) are “bought in” from independents and other departmental staff.

5.4 The progress of assessments is monitored through monthly supervision of team assessors. A time management chart (c.f. attached) is used to track the progress of assessments and identify plans to resolve any potential delays. The progress of any applicant from recruitment through to approval can now be tracked via the CHARMS database.

5.5 Assessments carried out beyond the team boundaries are more difficult to supervise. Given current management capacity within the team only minimal supervision/consultation can be offered to these assessors. This may have an impact on the monitoring of the quality and efficiency of assessments although many of these assessments are completed within the target time.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

6. ISSUES

- 6.1 CRB checks - Given the lengthy delays experienced during the implementation of the CRB system, many applicants over the last 18 months have had a considerable wait before progressing to Training and Assessment. The situation does appear to have improved somewhat latterly and applicants are being processed more quickly.
- 6.2 Undertaking statutory checks before inviting to training was regarded as an important safeguard and screening activity under the new structure since applicants did not receive a screening visit before being passed through for training and assessment.
- 6.3 Home/Screening visits - In the early months of the Training group activity concerns were raised about the number of inappropriate applicants attending training and then withdrawing or being counselled out. This meant that other perhaps more suitable applicants had to wait longer for groups. In an effort to improve cost effectiveness and prevent unnecessary inconvenience to applicants, screening visits were re-started for temporary fostering applicants. We still experience some fall-out following training but this is to be expected. Training groups serve to provide applicants with the opportunity to appreciate and consider the potential impact of the fostering task upon them and their families.
- 6.4 Long-term foster carers and adopters are not currently offered a home visit before attending groups. This has the disadvantage that people attend training, take time off work etc, sometimes only realise that adoption or fostering is not for them. For many this could be achieved via a home visit. Applicants have told us that they would like the opportunity to discuss their application at an early stage. It is our view in Fostering and Adoption that both the service to applicants and service efficiency would be improved if it were possible to re-instate the screening visits for all applicants. We are currently preparing a bid for Choice Protects funding to provide the additional capacity required to do this.
- 6.5 "Virtual team" – in order to extend capacity and reduce waiting times for assessment, additional assessments are commissioned from other family placement staff and from independent assessors. Whilst there have been some advantages in the practice, issues of quality and logistics have been problematic. We have reached the view that in order to ensure efficient and consistent delivery of the assessment service, additional capacity needs to be created within the team. We are preparing a Choice Protects bid for the additional staff.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

**Appendix 4: Business
Process Review of
Recruitment &
Assessment of Foster
Carers and Adoptive
Parents**



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Business Process Review of Recruitment & Assessment of foster carers and adoptive parents

Birmingham Social Services

May 2003



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Business Process Review of Recruitment & Assessment of foster carers and adoptive parents

Remit

Fostering Network was approached to undertake a business process review of the recruitment and assessment activity involved in processing prospective foster carers and adoptive parents from the point of contact with the Recruitment Shop to approval at Panel.

The objectives of the review were:

- Identify any potential blockages or potential delays in the process
- Identify means of addressing those blockages
- Identify whether 'fall out rates' are within acceptable/recognised limits
- Identify whether there is an awareness of factors behind people withdrawing from the process and whether the process contributes to decision making
- Drawing on National Minimum Standards and Regulations and practice experience/examples, make recommendations as to how the process could be improved including throughput, quality and risk factors

This review provides an early opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of the new organisational arrangements and the delivery of service. It builds on the knowledge gained from earlier reviews conducted by Fostering Network formerly National Foster Care Association.

The aim of this report and the recommendations made is to further improvements to practice and to build on the commendable beginning that has been made.

It should be noted that review activities were constrained because of the time allowed and therefore some of the conclusions drawn are from observation rather than data.

The term 'carer' is used to refer to both adoptive and foster carer.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Introduction

Birmingham's fostering and adoption services during the last four years have been subjected to a number of examinations and reviews. During this time there have been changes to regulations, minimum standards introduced and new national inspection framework established.

In response to the various reviews, the new national minimum standards and changes in regulations, the organisation of adoption and fostering services were restructured on a functional basis. The service since September 2001 is delivered through 10 teams following the path of promotion and recruitment through preparation, selection, supervision, development and support.

With the continued growth of the looked after population, the increasing use of external providers and government directives there has been increasing pressure on the service to deliver more qualitative substitute family care.

"The Government has set local authorities a target to increase the number of children adopted by at least 40% by 2004/05. To meet this target it will be essential to attract more people into considering becoming adoptive parents." (DOH)

Demand

Birmingham has experienced a steep rise in the number of children looked after.

The Gateway system has been set up as to receive referrals of children needing to be looked after and to ensure proper planning and the overall rate of increase has declined. The reduction in in-house residential capacity has added to the demand for foster care.

Supply

Birmingham has had inadequate information systems. The number of foster carers is still not known as a number friend and relative carers are still being identified. The percentage of looked after children in foster care has remained relatively stable over the last few years as well as the percentage of children placed for adoption. However the actual numbers involved has risen.

The Department has become more dependent on external providers for placements. This increase in use of external provision is costly to the authority and raises quality of care



Aspects of Internal Fostering

issues. The shortfall in public provision has provided an opportunity for the private sector to exploit. The Independent Fostering Agencies, IFA, care sector is now well established and continues to expand. There were 11 agencies in 1993 and the number rose to 120 in 2001. IFAs are now a significant provider of child placements and other services for looked after children.

IFAs have taken the initiative, tempted foster carers away with promises of better support and financial rewards and local authorities are left paying more for effectively the same service. The average costs of IFA placements are calculated to cost three times that of local authority foster care. However research is still needed to clarify the real costs and to offer fairer comparisons between IFAs and LA's.

Leeching of Birmingham's carers to the independent sector does not appear to be a major problem. Some authorities report losses between 10% and 25%. In positioning itself in the market place Birmingham needs to take account of the threat from the IFA sector.

Concern about the supply of foster carers inevitably puts the focus on recruitment and retention of foster carers. The Department has set up a system for identifying those who cease to foster and provide exit interviews. All terminations of approval are presented or reported to panel. Birmingham appears to be doing very well having a rate of 3% -6% which is significantly below the national average of 14%. Some city and metropolitan authorities report rates up to 25%.

Since reorganisation the number of carer approvals has shown a rise on previous years. In 2002/03 47 foster carers (this includes carers from non approved IFAs) and 61 adopters were approved. These numbers do not reflect all the assessment work which includes the assessment of temporary carers and family and friend carers to long term fostering or adoption.¹ Many authorities struggle to make a net increase to their stock of foster carers.

Recruitment to approval process

Most authorities have evolved a similar route from enquiry to approval over the last two decades.

Enquiry

Information by post

Group meeting

Home visit

¹ Number of approvals as adopters from current carers not known



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Preparation

Home study

Referees

Report

Checks

Panel

Decision

Variations on this process are often dependent upon the size and geography of the agency and staff's willingness to experiment. Smaller agencies have found group meetings to be ineffective. The vast majority of agencies undertake initial or screening interviews. Some agencies undertake home studies alongside preparatory training.

Historically formal applications have been accepted after preparatory training when it was considered that applicants have more understanding of the task to be undertaken. Also because performance targets have often been measured from 'application' agencies are more inclined to give applications further along the production process.

Agencies are now undertaking the application earlier in the process usually after the initial interview. This has come about largely because of the increase in the 'investigative' element and the quality and quantity of checks and references required and the time delays with statutory checks, including the recent CRB fiasco. Some agencies will not progress until certain checks and references have been received whilst other will commence the process of preparation and home study as soon as practicable.

Studies during the 1990's have found that over 70% of applications were completed within 6 months from first enquiry to approval. With the pressure on placements, government guidelines and increasing competition from the private sector greater focus has been placed on the time taken to process applicants. IFAs have led the way and report that the majority of applications are completed within 6 months and where an applicant has experience this time is reduced to 4 months. There is no evidence to suggest that the emphasis on shorter time for selection lead to a poorer quality of carer. It is known that the majority of those who enquire about fostering and adoption have thought about it for some time and their application is not impulsive. Also it has been found that those who apply particularly for fostering do so at a time when it suits their domestic circumstances and leave when these change.

Recruitment



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Within the new organisation of the service a Recruitment Team has been established based in a shop in the City Centre. The shop is staffed throughout the day Monday to Saturday and Thursday evening. Members of the public are encouraged to drop in. The shop serves purposes beyond those of recruitment by offering information and advice on all aspects of adoption and fostering and thereby provides a wider social care function. Although it should be noted that the shop does not provide confidential interview facilities.

The team of 8 FTE staff comprises a manager, social workers, promotion officer and administration. Not all the social workers are qualified. The Recruitment Shop uses other departmental workers to cover sessions out of normal working hours. The staffing of the shop out of office hours is problematic because of availability issues of social workers and administrative staff. As a consequence there is a the danger of a two tier service developing as it is difficult to keep workers from outside the team up to speed with current campaigns and ensure they understand all the complexities of adoption and fostering.

The Recruitment Team staff deal with all enquiries. Dedicated staff makes it possible for informed conversation in depth to occur. Workers follow up written and electronic referrals on duty. Information packs are sent out with invitation to open meetings. The frequency and timing of the meetings is such that most interested people should be able to attend. The majority of open meetings are held at the shop. Where people do not respond to the invitation to the open meeting they are often 'called back' to find out the reasons why. Foster carers and adoptive parents take part in open meetings.

The Team are maintaining records of sources of referral and outcomes which will assist in future recruitment planning.

The target time from initial enquiry to completed application is set at 3 months. It may be more effective to break this target down to smaller targets to reflect the performance of workers rather than the motivation of enquirers. For example
Enquiry to information pack sent out 3 days. Initial interview from receipt of application 2 weeks.

From the open meetings those who attend are invited to take an information pack with an application and return the application by visiting the shop to complete the CRB request form. Staff argue that this provides a further opportunity for contact with a member of the Department, and ensures the application is completed properly. It is reported that there is a wide variation in the time taken by people between attending an open meeting and visiting the shop with their application. Follow up telephone calls are made to those who have attended meetings but who have not completed an application. The Recruitment Team send off for the CRB check and after receipt the application is forwarded to the Assessment Team. The length taken before the return of the CRB varies greatly and is unproductive time both for the applicant and the Department. It can be several weeks before the CRB check is processed and even where a screening visit is undertaken during this period there can be a long period of inactivity. If the Department is serious about reducing the 'production' time then this process needs to be reviewed. The Department needs to ensure that its corporate



Aspects of Internal Fostering

responsibilities are efficient. As importantly to decide whether applications can continue to be processed whilst the CRB check is awaited.

Birmingham's approach to enquiries addresses past criticism and includes best practice "*Adopting Changes* made it clear that prospective adopters were anxious to be reassured that their services were needed and valued. Agencies should give particular attention to their front of house service, ensuring that enquiries are directed promptly to someone with the appropriate training to deal with them." (DOH) Surveys of foster carers show not unsurprisingly that what was helpful to them was speaking to someone knowledgeable, receiving information quickly, being given an early chance to speak to someone face to face and talking to an experienced carer. "Adopted children and existing adopters are a hugely valuable resource in the information-giving process and agencies should involve them as much as possible at all stages." (DOH)

Recruitment is a continuous activity and cannot be separated from promotional efforts as well as specific recruitment. Promotion of family substitute care has a number of different purposes it 'ground baits' potential applicants but as importantly it influences public opinion and improves the image of public care.

The Department is making good use of promotional activities. The Recruitment Team has strong links with the Press Department; there are regular features in Birmingham's Voice , city newspapers and local radio. Civic events with attached publicity and reporting for example long service awards add to the 'goodwill' feel. Activities within local communities have established links with different religious and cultural groups.

In most authorities whilst a lot of effort goes into the recruitment it is mostly in an episodic and unsystematic way. Historically there was little relationship between the seriousness of carer shortages and the frequency of an authority's recruitment pattern. Often the predominant consideration about recruitment has been budgetary and the availability and experience of staff. Many authorities suffer from the expectations for 'instant' result which influences the way some managers have supported recruitment efforts.

Many authorities in their recruitment focus mainly on the specific needs of children and are less well targeted to particular groups of carers. Missing are long term policy and direction, clear targeting and a marketing approach.

Birmingham has gone some way in developing a rigorous and marketing strategy which addresses some of these difficulties and criticisms. Birmingham has made significant improvements during the last 18 months. Consistency of approach has been established, the shop provides accessibility and focus. A corporate image has been developed with excellent materials including video and posters. The size of the authority gives it a unique advantage in the market place.

Recruitment needs to make efforts to be more inclusive of carers. To think more about the product and market the task and role of caring. To think more of place in marketing terms and Birmingham's position vis a vis the private sector. To improve the percentage of



Aspects of Internal Fostering

enquirers who pass on to assessment and then approval. To constantly evaluate effectiveness and performance by formal service evaluations e.g. mystery shopper exercises, customer satisfaction surveys and marketing groups.

Assessments

An Assessment Team has been established within the new structure which is responsible for all adoption and fostering assessments except for family and friend carers. The Team undertakes all preparatory training.

The Team is made up of 10 FTE social worker, 2 Team managers who job share, a newly appointed training co-ordinator and administrative staff. One of the social workers is not qualified. "Any social work staff involved in assessment and approval of foster carers are qualified social workers, have experience of foster care and family placement work and are trained in assessment." (NMS)

The Team has had mixed fortunes over the last 18 months. It inherited a number of cases which had been left on hold during the period of reorganisation. The courts have set the priority to process applications for known children. There has not been a full complement of staff and staff are of mixed experience. There is pressure to provide preparatory training and not to have people waiting. There is increasing demand on staff to work out of office hours. The consensus amongst current carers nationally is that assessment and preparation often took too long.

The new arrangements have brought a standardisation of the assessment process with an understanding and implementation of the recommendations of the safeguards review. The Department is using evidence based competency assessments and most cases reach a satisfactory standard. A number of applicant files at different stages of application were studied. Even those files which were completed and had been to panel did not contain assessment records.

There is a variation in administrative practice and standard which appears to have evolved over time with differences in demands made on the service and staff's expectations. Practice standards should be set and agreed by service managers so that all social work and administrative staff have an understanding of minimum service standards in order to provide a consistent and effective service.

The Team undertake all the preparatory training. Training is run at different times to provide opportunity for all to attend. Courses are mostly run at Pype Hayes. The recent appointment of a training co-ordinator will hopefully reduce pressure on staff in the organisation and management of courses. Investment is required to improve the standard of training facilities and staff's skills in further education training.

Within the business plans assessment targets were set. Members of the assessment team



Aspects of Internal Fostering

were expected to complete 6 assessments within 3 months and thereby each worker would have processed 24 households a year. There was also an expectation that 10 assessments per month would be contracted out thereby producing up to 100 household in a year. These targets would in total produce over 300 new and re-approved carer households in any one year. It is doubtful whether these targets were realistic however Birmingham is well below this target.

There is a tension between assessing numbers of applicants and prioritising applications to better meet the needs of children. Managers need to be supported to use best professional judgement about applications. "However it is the unequivocal duty of the Department to find the most suitable placements and no one has the 'right' to foster or adopt." (DOH)

It is estimated nationally that it cost £12,000 to approve a carer.² It is a major investment by any department and therefore a department needs to be assured that they are getting a 'product' that they need.

A number of factors contribute to Birmingham's current difficulties. The batch flow production method, the heavy demand on out of office hours work, service culture, inadequate level of administration. Each unit of qualified social workers time needs to be regarded as a precious commodity. It is likely to become scarcer as local authority family placement work becomes less attractive and more lucrative work can be obtained in the private sector and less stressful as independent assessors. More effort for applicants to attend day time interviews and office interviews need to be made. Workers need to be assisted their organisation and administration. Effort to train carers in adult learning in order that they can take an equal share in training. It should only require one worker to co-lead training group and in light of the safeguards review the group worker should not undertake the assessment.

Approval

Under the new organisation a Panel Team has been established. The Team manages the Department's 7 different adoption and fostering panels. The Panel Manager and Panel advisers take a lead role in setting professional standards.

Panel chairs are drawn from within the Department but each Panel is made up of a members drawn from the wider community and stakeholders. Panel procedures and protocols have been established. Staff can book items into the Adoption Panels but not Fostering as it is said because of the unreliability of all staff in meeting deadlines. The Panels have permanent minute takers, pre-set agendas and standard recording formats which ensure that regulations and standards are achieved. Systems have been established to evaluate outcome and to follow up on outstanding matters. Applicants are now able to attend all Panels.

² This calculation was made some years ago and indexed subsequently



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Birmingham has made enormous progress in its Panel arrangements and performance since the reviews of 2000 and now are a model for other authorities to copy.

It is noted that the Panels act still as quality control system for the Department rather than as part of the overall quality assurance system as expected. Still some reports are not up to standard. Panel gives direction about child care planning and issues an alarming number of 'notices of concern'. There are some reported delays in getting items on Panel and inevitable delays for decisions to be made following Panel's recommendations. It is a very high workload for the agency decision-makers.

Practice Issues and Recommendations

Generate more quality enquiries

An issue for the Department is the generation of quality enquiries. Setting numerical targets year on year about the number of enquiries is not the best way forward. It is too early to judge the drop out rate of enquirer to approved carer but the early signs are showing the rate around 10%. Reports from other authorities report similar rates from foster care general campaigns. The rate reported from non specific recruitment activity that is from general enquiry to agencies is reported at 20% along with a similar rate for targeted and specialised campaigns.

"Effectiveness should not be judged by the number of responses received but by their quality and relevance". (DOH)

Factors which have been found nationally to hold people back from applying as carers include: lack of awareness, fear that they will not measure up to agency expectations, lack of confidence to care for other peoples' children, mistrust of social workers, the poor image of children needing care, having to return children and protracted assessments

◆ Establish criteria for foster and adoptive carers.

Staff spoke of a reluctance to establish criteria beyond a few generalities of age, place of residence because they believe that elected members would not give their approval. Generating enquiries from people who will not be suitable for Birmingham's looked after population is not cost effective and can be unkind. Senior managers have a responsibility to ensure elected members understand the needs of the service. "The registered provider [in the case of a local authority, the elected members] formally approves the statement of purpose of the fostering service, and reviews, updates and modifies it where necessary at least annually." (NMS 13.1) "Applicants do not have a right to attend a preparation course or to be assessed. Agencies should have clearly identified priorities for recruiting adopters to meet the needs of the children waiting for families, and should use these to determine whether to proceed with an application." (DOH Guidance)



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Staff currently apply informal selection criteria. Applicants will not be considered for temporary caring where the main carer works for more than 12 hours. Applicants need to know against what criteria they will be assessed. Criteria can be written in an encouraging rather than off putting way and also in a manner which suggests a willingness to be flexible in certain circumstances.

"decide whether or not to proceed with the application based on:

- The minimum legal and agency criteria;
- The agency's priority areas for recruitment." (DOH)

"Agencies will prioritise applications that are more likely to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption." (DOH)

◆ Application form

The application form has recently been reviewed however it would benefit from a revisit in order to ensure that it provides qualitative information not only to safeguard children but also so a judgement can be made about the applicant's ability to meet criteria. The layout should allow sufficient space for the information to be provided.

"The application form should ask for details about the applicants that enable legal and agency eligibility criteria to be checked. This should include details of:

- marital status, nationality, domicile, ethnicity, language, religion, age, criminal convictions;
- family composition, education, employment history, income, housing, health, experience with children;" (NMS)

"Ensure that checks are carried out to validate the facts of the application" (DOH)



Aspects of Internal Fostering

◆ Provide real opportunities for income through foster caring.

Anyone wishing to be assured of an income from fostering cannot make an application to become a level 4 carer knowing that their application will be processed in such a way that at approval they know an income will be assured. Fees are paid to carers according to the judgement made on their competency. The team managers of the support teams following assessment currently make this judgement.

◆ Establish the qualities and characteristics and caring circumstances that Birmingham requires for children looked after and in need of adoptive placement and set priorities for recruitment.

Much attention is given to the placements which cannot be made and planning recruitment around the specific need areas of identifiable groups. The lead-time on finding a placement at best is 12 months and can be much longer. For many groups of children this is too long. Proactive recruitment rather than reactive will have better outcomes.

- Make an analysis of all current placements
- Return to the 'matching needs and service' audit and look at the messages from that work.
- Examine local demographics.
- Consider setting up an interest group with other authorities to examine placement trends.
- Examine placement routes by looking in detail at a sample of child placement histories. For example many children have found their long term foster home by default as the length of placement in temporary care has become protracted. For many children this hopefully will be a positive outcome. If however more long-term foster homes were available this would provide more choice and less diminution of temporary carer stock.

"The fostering service has a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service." (NMS)

◆ Market the role of the foster carer and adopter

Profile Birmingham's carers (and possibly the foster carers provided by IFAs) in order to target similar groups. Birmingham has some basic information on existing carers but not sufficiently detailed to know who to target.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Recruit people to foster caring rather than selling children's needs. Use census information to target wards where the population has a characteristic match. (New census material presents new opportunity)

◆ Understand better what potential recruits there are in Birmingham.

Use ward profiling to understand the citizenship of Birmingham. It is known that family composition, working patterns etc has changed. Attempting to recruit people in certain circumstances, for example married couple, one partner at home with older children in four-bedroom accommodation when the number of potential recruits is unknown may be totally unsuccessful. It may be found for example that the largest grouping of potential recruits are single, childless, people living in two bedroom accommodation. A recruitment officer from a London Borough has used ward data to understand the target audience of the Borough and used advertising material considered to be appropriate to the lifestyle of that particular population. Early reports are encouraging with above average number of enquiries for the Borough with a better than average carry on rate.

◆ Target recruitment at certain sectors

Target people connected with certain jobs such as social care, which attract 40% of all carers. Targeting those aged 40-50 who are underrepresented at recruitment but are undertaking some of the most challenging cases nationally.

Women are found generally to initiate the decisions to foster. Carers are more likely to worship compared to the rest of the population. Rarely are the childless or childfree and the unemployed targeted as potential carers.

◆ Involve Carers more in recruitment

Carers report nationally that they do not think that their involvement goes far enough. Carers maintain that their much greater involvement could help bridge the apparent credibility gap between social workers and the public and better address some of the misconceptions and stereo types held about fostering and adoption. In Birmingham they have the potential to offer a great deal more than they currently provide. There is an



Aspects of Internal Fostering

opportunity cost here, not only are carers well received by applicants and knowledgeable, they are cost effective. Consider contracting carers on a sessional basis.

◆ Market the professional nature of foster caring

Provide more clarity on financial matters and financial rewards to rid the notion that pay and caring do not go together. Emphasise the professional nature of the job and that fostering could be part of career progression and the possibility of obtaining relevant qualifications. Foster carers unfortunately are not for life, whilst some will pick up long service awards other will come and go and the transient nature of caring needs to be acknowledge. Offer something in return which may be attractive to some people. A shared care scheme reported great success by saying in their advertising that it was an opportunity to gain experience and foundation training to further a career in social care

◆ Market 'doing good'

Social workers are traditionally wary of those who feel 'sorry' for children separated from their families or who show 'rescue' motivation however studies have shown that whilst carers have a range of motives most are altruistic in nature. On the whole carers are confident that they have something to offer, have a commitment to disadvantaged children and have a heightened sense of awareness about childcare needs.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Speed up the process from enquiry to approval

- ◆ **Establish time standards for each stage of the process.**

Whilst National Standards state time limits and the Department has set its own they are generally stated in a general manner. To judge departmental performance they need to be broken down. Some potential carers will take longer than others and it is important that potential carers go at their own pace and are not held back by the Department or unduly pressurised. Blockages can then be identified and performance can be measured. Time scales are not made explicit and given to enquirers. Systems should also be tested by 'mystery shopper' type exercises.

- ◆ **Keep under review the effectiveness of the open meeting system**

Whilst enquirers who cannot attend an open meeting can be seen at the shop the choice of open meeting or home visit is not offered routinely. Staff maintain that given the number of enquirers it is not possible to offer all home visits and do not believe that it adversely affects those who continue. However given the low percentage who go on to make an application an open attitude to this approach needs to be maintained. An independent researcher to look at sample of those who made enquiry but did not go any further would be useful. (It has been demonstrated in previous research of this type that the researcher does need to be independent of the agency.) If fewer enquiries of greater quality are made the system may be more manageable.

- ◆ **Undertake initial interview of all enquirers.**

Currently only temporary carers have been seen for an initial or screening interview. It is planned to include long term carers. All potential carers need to be seen before undertaking references and checks and inviting to preparation groups. The current system puts the burden and use of resources further down the line. By having a more comprehensive application form, by setting criteria and priority for recruitment the number of interviews would be reduced.

"It is important both for potential applicants and agencies that time is not spent pursuing an application that is unlikely to succeed. Agencies should give potential applicants the opportunity to discuss questions that have not been answered following the information session." (DOH)

- ◆ **Do not wait for CRB checks to be completed before next stage**

Either recruitment staff or assessment staff should undertake the verification for the CRB check and the invitation for preparation should be sent at the same time as the CRB check



Aspects of Internal Fostering

is sent. Historically police references were undertaken after preparation in most agencies. The application form asks for information about convictions so if doubt exists advice can be sought before progressing. If applicant has not disclosed information about their criminal convictions then although they will be unsuitable to care the risk to staff and group members is small.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

◆ Manage staffing issues

The large number of additional workers who are needed to assist in the recruitment and assessment process is problematic. The co-ordination and supervision of workers external to the Recruitment and Assessment Teams puts a disproportionate burden on the Team Managers. Managing the shop rota takes up the time of managers which could be used more effectively.

In order to be assured of supply and quality of service consider establishing a system to recruit and manage a pool of qualified workers or contracting with an agency to provide assessment and out of office hours. IFAs will pay an incentive fee for independent workers to complete assessment early. Recruiting staff to the shop for set hours.

Managing the new organisation

The new structure has produced many benefits and appears to have re-energised the service. A potential downfall of new structure is that each team works to its own performance measure rather than the service as a whole. For example the assessment team may have difficulty in reaching approval targets if the 'raw materials' passed on from recruitment team are 'substandard'. The Recruitment Team could meet its target but the Support team may experience reduction in retention rates because of poor preparation and assessment.

The recruitment and assessment process as it is now established with the batch flow and movements to different part of the 'production plant' has quality problems built into it. There is no one in control of the overall production process and for the applicants there is stop go and no one person as their point of reference. As a manager from an IFA said "it is important to keep them (potential carers) bouncing along, even if it is only the illusion of movement".

A 'process costing' exercise would help establish the costs of the 'added value' at each stage of the recruitment and assessment process. This would provide essential information for future planning. Birmingham's current arrangements provide a unique opportunity for such a costing exercise.



Appendix 5: Kinship Carers

1. ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- 1.1 The kinship support team was established in 2001 as part of a number of support teams for foster carers. The majority of the team consists of support workers for fully approved kinship carers. The main assessment team was becoming overloaded with kinship assessments so the post of Kinship Assessment Co-ordinator was also created and forms part of the kinship support team.
- 1.2 Currently there are 143 homes with kinship carers.
- 1.3 The Area Office has the power to make an **emergency placement** - that is, place children with relatives for up to 6 weeks, for which a fostering allowance may be paid.
- 1.4 A child cannot be placed for longer than 6 weeks without **interim approval**. For this CRB checks must be started, carers must be interviewed, accommodation must be checked and a care plan must be submitted.
- 1.5 It should be remembered that Section 17 money can be paid to relatives for up to 20 weeks without taking the child into care. A decision needs to be reached in this time as to whether the child is at risk - all kinship placements are for Looked After Children. A child does not become Looked After purely due to financial circumstances.
- 1.6 All interim approval papers come to the Kinship Assessment Co-ordinator. During the interim approval stage an allocation is made and the process of full assessment begins.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

- 1.7 At present in Birmingham many assessments are commissioned to ISWA, and are monitored by the Kinship Assessment Co-ordinator.
- 1.8 The process of full assessment begins after interim approval. For this, the social worker needs to present substantial background information including the care plan, Looked After paperwork, information on CRB checks, etc. Interim approval is made at panel.
- 1.9 In order to then make a full assessment, the following information is required: medicals for applicants, CRB checks, information from interviews with families and children (approx 6), interviews of 3 referees and report for panel. A Form F is completed (see Appendix 2) - Part 1 goes to the interim panel and part 2 is completed by the assessor. The full assessment normally takes up to 3 months and this can be influenced by court directives.
- 1.10 This paperwork, plus information from the Area Office, goes to the panel. Information is needed on 3 things for kinship placements (unlike other foster placements) : info on the child, the carer and the link between them, all of which are the responsibility of the Area.
- 1.11 Obviously, the paperwork requirements cause considerable delay. There may soon be an imperative to speed up the process in line with court protocols.
- 1.12 There are 110 current assessments. A further 90 referrals are awaiting further information and paperwork.

2. Issues around initial assessment (prior to emergency placement) and emergency placement

- 2.1 The decision as to whether a child is placed with family or a stranger is made at the initial assessment, during the child protection investigation.
- 2.2 It is at this stage that the key decision must be made to make a kinship placement, as opposed to a Residence Order or adoption.
- 2.3 Although there are opportunities to review and discuss this decision at the Looked After review and by the courts, a commitment made at this stage is difficult to turn around.
- 2.4 After the initial assessment and throughout the emergency placement, the Area remains involved and the child is visited by a social worker every 6 weeks. If CRB checks have not been



Aspects of Internal Fostering

completed then the child is visited weekly. No emergency placement is made without an assessment.

- 2.5 The kinship support team does not get involved until after interim approval.

3. Issues and risks involved in kinship care

- 3.1 Although the standards for kinship carers are the same as those for non-relatives (in terms of assessment forms, visiting frequency of support workers, CRB checks) there is no pre-approval training for kinship carers. However, there is always an assessment and post-approval training.
- 3.2 Where there is a breakdown in a kinship placement, every attempt is made to keep the placement going. Options explored include respite care and counselling and support (via CAMHS), but if a solution is impossible a Looked After child will be found an alternative placement in a non-kinship home. Statistics from the panel team on deregistrations show there have been about 10 placement breakdowns since 2001.
- 3.3 It was previously thought that a kinship carer would not necessarily be able to protect a child from the family he or she had been removed from (for example a grandmother would not be able to shield the child from an abusive parent). However, the whole process of assessment and contact has been reviewed, although it is acknowledged that there could be difficulties and that support may be required.

4. Problems with assessment process

- 4.1 The biggest problem is in the management of a huge piece of work that takes a very long time. There are concerns that it takes too long, particularly with the requirements around the court directions and processes (e.g. requirements for legal liaison and statements of evidence). Other issues include:
- Care Planning - are the right decisions being made in the first place?
 - Volume of kinship assessments commissioned - is it 'trendy'?/are there too many?
 - Reactive placements vs. assessments 'just in case' - at huge expense (approx. £2,000 per assessment) or



Aspects of Internal Fostering

even more if potential carer lives abroad

- Other budget pressures
- Pressures around court timetabling
- Are there enough fully supported carers?
- Sheer amount of paperwork - getting it in from the Areas and processing it
- 'Virtual' team of assessors (as at present) or in-house? We commit a high proportion of our budget to external assessments - could the money be used to employ social workers? However, there is a shortage of social workers, independent assessment may be more efficient? and no management costs.
- Not enough training and group work for kinship carers - ideally there would be a trainer in post so support workers could spend less time on training and more time visiting.
- There are no real statistics on outcomes available.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

5. Conclusions:

- 5.1 The process could be effectively streamlined. Delays in receiving paperwork are compounded by delays in panel dates being decided, holding up both the interim assessment and then, months later, the final placement.

Namita Srivastava

16/10/03

Appendix 1: Statistics on assessments commissioned and referrals

Appendix 2: Form F



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Appendix 1: Statistics on assessments commissioned and referrals

The Co-ordination of Kinship Assessments

At the present moment there are 110 fully commissioned assessment going through the process and awaiting to be presented to Panel. There are also 90 referrals awaiting further information/ paperwork before being fully commissioned.

ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED BY KINSHIP SUPPORT TEAM

These are assessment completed but not necessarily been presented to Panel. There are various reasons why they have not been presented to Panel. Some have gone for Residence Order before going to Panel, or the placement has not been found suitable or placement disrupted. A 146 Kinship Assessments have been commissioned since June 2002.

| YEAR 2002 | Number of Assessments Commissioned |
|------------------|---|
| October | 8 |
| November | 10 |
| December | 4 |
| | |
| YEAR 2003 | Number Of Assessments Commissioned |
| January | 8 |
| February | 5 |
| March | 8 |
| April | 8 |
| May | 8 |
| June | 9 |
| July | 9 |
| August | 13 |
| September | 10 |

Number of Kinship assessments to Panel from January 03 to July 03 for full approval is 24 cases.

REFERRALS TAKEN FOR KINSHIP ASSESSMENTS



Aspects of Internal Fostering

| YEAR 2003 | Number Of Referrals |
|-----------|---------------------|
| January | 9 |
| February | 15 |
| March | 17 |
| April | 24 |
| May | 14 |
| June | 18 |
| July | 17 |
| August | 13 |
| September | 19 |

Closed cases

From January to September 2003 over 50 cases have been closed for no further action.

Reasons for cases being closed

- 1) Not to be suitable carers.
- 2) Applicants changing their minds.
- 3) Change in the plans for the child.
- 4) Applicants going forward to apply for a Residence Order.
- 5) Placement broken down.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

This report is the property of(local authority/agency) and is written in connection with an application for approval of foster carer(s), adopter(s) or other carers. Applicants must not copy this document or disclose the contents of the report, in full or in part, to any other person, agency or authority. Applicants must not give this document or show it, or any part of it, to any other person, agency or authority, not even on a temporary basis without the agency's permission.

Information in connection with an application for approval of carer(s) for a specific known child

Please read Notes for guidance before filling in the form.

1 Agency details

Name of Agency

Address

Town

Postcode

Telephone
Minicom Tel No.

Fax

E-Mail

Name of social worker
leader

Name of senior social worker/team

Telephone
Fax E-Mail

Date Form F completed
updated

Date Form F

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Page 2

2 Details of applicant(s) (state gender F/M)

| | 1st Applicant | 2nd |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-----|
| Applicant Surname | | |
| Previous names (if applicable) | | |
| Forename(s) Also known as | | |
| Date of birth | | |
| *Ethnic descent | | |
| Language/s spoken at home | | |
| Religion | | |
| Practising | | |
| Occupation | | |
| Current/proposed hours of work | | |
| Address | | |
| Town | | |
| Postcode | | |
| Telephone | | |

*See paragraph on Ethnic descent in Notes for guidance



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 3

Please attach recent photograph

Please state applicant(s) specific relationship to child to be placed/already placed (indicate whether carer(s) have or have had parental responsibility for the child)

3 Children in the household

| | | | | | |
|------|------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|
| Name | Gender | Date of birth | Ethnic descent | Type of school | |
| | Relationship to* | | | | applicant |

Relationship to child who is to be placed **Self/ Subject**

4 Type of resource *Please tick categories which apply*

Permanence

| | | | |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Adoption | <input type="checkbox"/> | Adoption (with adoption allowance) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Long-term fostering | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Other (e.g.. Residence Order, Parental Responsibilities Order) | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Time limited/Task centred

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Pre-adoption | <input type="checkbox"/> | Respite care | <input type="checkbox"/> | Emergency | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remand | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bridging placement | <input type="checkbox"/> | Short term | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Parent and child Carer | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | | ✓ BACK-UP | |

**Please state relationship to applicant(s) (e.g.. birth child, step-child, fostered, adopted, or born as a result of assisted conception)*



Aspects of Internal Fostering



CONFIDENTIAL

Form F2 PART 1

Page 4

5 Details of child/ren for whom the applicant(s) is/are being assessed

Please refer to Form E for full details of child/ren

Name/s

Date of birth

Gender

Ethnic descent

Physical impairment/learning disabilities

Religion

Languages spoken at home

Current placement
(including length of time and whether this is a "same-race" placement;
also refer to religion, language and culture)



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Legal status of child

Please state any legal implications for placement -

Are any specific approvals (e.g.. Director of Social Services/Courts/Children's Hearings) necessary before placement? -

**Please state relationship to applicant(s) (e.g.. birth child, step-child, fostered, adopted, or born as a result of assisted conception)*



Aspects of Internal Fostering

CONFIDENTIAL

Form F2 PART 1

Page 5

6

Oth

| | | | | | |
|---------------|--------|---------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| Name | Gender | Date of birth | Ethnic descent | Whereabouts | State |
| relationship* | | | | | applicant(s) |

7 Other adult members of the household (including grown-up children living at home)

| | | | | |
|---------|--------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Name | Gender | Date of birth | Ethnic descent | Relationship |
| (e.g.. | | | | relative, |
| lodger, | | | | friend, respite |
| carer) | | | | |

8 Other significant adults (i.e. who will be involved/have contact with the children on a regular basis)

Please mark ** those for whom checks are required

| | | | | |
|---------|--------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Name | Gender | Date of birth | Ethnic descent | Relationship |
| (e.g.. | | | | relative, |
| lodger, | | | | friend, respite |
| carer) | | | | |

**Please state relationship to applicant(s) (e.g.. birth child, step-child, fostered, adopted, or born as a result of assisted conception)*

***See paragraph on legal framework in Notes for Guidance*



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 6

9 Accommodation, neighbourhood, mobility

Comment on the ethnic composition of the locality, and on the availability and characteristics of specific amenities, including schools, medical resources, community and religious groups, and recreational facilities. Indicate public transport facilities and proximity of the above amenities to the applicant(s)' home.

Type of accommodation; type and security of tenure; proposed sleeping arrangements for the child.

Please indicate whether a **Health and Safety Checklist** has been completed and highlight any issues arising from this.

If applicant(s) plan to move, give details and any implications for the child placed/to be placed.

10 Pets

Do the applicant(s) have pets? Please specify.

Are there any limitations to accepting a child accompanied by a pet? -



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 7

11 Verification of applicant(s)' identity

Is/are the applicant(s) domiciled* in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man? (In England and Wales, an adoption order cannot be made unless the applicant(s) (or one of them if a married couple) is/are so domiciled.)

If no, give domicile

| Nationality | 1st applicant | 2nd applicant |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|
|-------------|---------------|---------------|

Date birth certificate seen

Marital status

If married to each other give date, place of marriage and date certificate or equivalent document seen

Length of marriage/partnership

Has either of the applicants had a previous marriage?

| 1st applicant | 2nd applicant |
|---------------|---------------|
|---------------|---------------|

If yes, give details, how terminated and, if children involved, custody or residence arrangements made.
Specify documents seen and date.

**Domicile is not the same as residence. The nearest definition is permanent home: a person may be resident for many years in another country without ceasing to be domiciled in the country he/she regards as "home". Legal advice should always be sought early on in cases where there is any uncertainty.*



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 8

11 b Career history

This should include work and other non-work experience including education - schools attended, further or higher education. All time since leaving full-time education should be accounted for and details given for any period not in full-time employment, education or training. This would include unemployment, voluntary work and leisure activities, raising a family, part-time work or education.

A chronological account of all name changes and addresses should be provided for all adults in the household. Confirmation should be provided that a **National Insurance** number has been obtained for each applicant and used for the purpose of confirming identity in relation to employment history.

N.I. number –



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 9

Career history (contd)

11c Agency enquiries (including police checks)

These are required by:

- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 (as amended)**
- The Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991 (as amended)**
- The Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 1996**
- The Fostering of Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996**

Or

Are recommended by the **Code of Practice on Assessment of Carers 1999**.

Please specify on whom checks have been carried out and by which agency; include all adult members of the household and significant others.

| | 1st applicant | 2nd applicant | Other |
|--------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| adults | | | |

- Date check returned
- Police
- DoH Consultancy Index (England & Wales only)
- Probation (England & Wales only)
- Medicals - Form Adult 1
- Health
- Accommodation

* Check needs to ensure that mortgage/rental payments are up to date.



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 10

| | 1st applicant | 2nd applicant | Other |
|--|---------------|---------------|-------|
| adults | | | |
| Education | | | |
| NSPCC/Children First | | | |
| Social Services/Social Work Department | | | |
| Independent referees | | | |
| Employer* | | | |
| Family member | | | |
| Other | | | |

N.B. Not all checks are relevant for all applicants. Please consult the appropriate regulations.

Comment on any issues arising from the above checks.

12 Application, preparation groups, assessment

N.B. Preparation groups form part of the assessment process

When was the application first made?

Date home study started

State number of times applicant(s) seen

For joint applicants state number of times seen 1st applicant 2nd applicant
 Separately
 Together

For applicants where there are already children in the household, state number of times family group seen and number of times children seen separately.

Family group
 Children in family
 Date group preparation started

State the number and type of group meetings attended by the applicant(s). Detail the ethnic mix of the group. Outline the specific areas covered (attach training programme). Comment on the applicant(s)' participation in the group. Summarise written comment from group leaders. State the applicant(s)' own assessment of the usefulness of the preparation groups. Identify any further areas of training needed and how these training needs will be met.

**Employer's references should always be sought where employment involves contact with children.*



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1

CONFIDENTIAL

Page 11

Where group preparation is not offered, please state the type of preparation the applicant(s) have received. Have they had the opportunity to learn about the needs/behaviours of "looked after" children? Have they met experienced foster carers/adopters? What reading material has been available to them?

13 *Health (BAAF publishes standard medical forms for the examination of applicants)

Name, address and telephone number of family doctor(s)

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Date of medical report | 1st applicant | 2nd applicant |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|

Update

Applicants should have been seen in the three months prior to the medical reports being completed.

Comments of medical adviser

Are there any medical implications for the applicant(s)' ability to care for this child? If so, how will the applicant(s) be helped with this? How significant are these factors considered to be in relation to other positives offered to the child by this placement?

Does any member of the household or extended family have a physical, mental or emotional disability/difficulty (e.g.. Alzheimer's disease, asthma, heart condition, etc)? Include details of disabled children.

**See paragraph on Confidentiality in Notes for guidance*



Aspects of Internal Fostering

Form F2 PART 1 CONFIDENTIAL

Page 12

What is the applicant(s)' attitude to health and ill-health/medical treatment generally? Are there any factors to consider in relation to medical treatment for a child placed?

14 *Personal references

State whether referees have been interviewed (Please attach full record of visits to referees)

Indicate the relationship of the referee to the applicant(s) and length of time they have known the applicant(s).

Comment on the evidence they provide of the applicant(s)' ability to perform the tasks involved. Please link this with the required competences outlined in Part 4.

Referee 1

Date of visit

Referee 2

Date of visit

Referee 3

Date of visit

**See paragraph on Confidentiality in Notes for guidance.*

Regulation 8(2)(e) of the Adoption Agency Regulations 1983 and Schedule 2, part IV of the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 1996 both require the provision of two references from non-family members. In England and Wales there is a requirement for both referees to be personally interviewed. There is no such requirement in the Scottish Regulations. In addition some agencies require a reference from a member of the wider family.