



Oxfordshire Fostering Team
Fostering Recruitment Strategy
2016 -2019



Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2016 to 2019

Introduction

The strategy sets out our approach taken to recruit foster carers over the next 3 years: 2016 - 2019.

It is part of a range of strategies to improve placement choice for children and young people in need of placements which include partnerships with Other Local Authorities and private and voluntary providers. Placement matching has been identified as a critical factor in improving the outcomes for children and young people.

Aims and Objectives:

- To provide an effective, high quality and best value fostering service to meet the needs and numbers of the looked after population
- To improve placement choice and stability for children and young people, by:
 - increasing the number of in-house county foster carers
 - increasing the number of long term foster carers for older children
 - increasing the number of foster carers for disabled children, siblings, Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children (UASC)
 - increasing the number placements for children and young people who are more difficult to place by targeted recruitment campaigns and specialist training and support packages
- To increase the number of in-house placements and therefore reduce the number of children placed within Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) in order to reduce the cost to the authority of the provision of care for Looked After Children (LAC)
- To ensure that all people who are interested in becoming foster carers are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support services.

Scope

The recruitment strategy covers the development of Oxfordshire's mainstream, disability and MTFC fostering.

Target

A recruitment target has been set of 135 new carers over the next 3 years, offering short term, relief/SB and long term placements, made up of 45 new carers per year.

Summary

The Council's aim is to ensure that all children living in Oxfordshire have the opportunity to grow up in permanent, safe and loving homes and where this cannot be provided by the birth parents or extended family, fostering and/or adoption will be considered.

A key objective of the fostering service is to recruit a pool foster carers who meet the assessed needs of the children needing placements.

Today, over 64,000 children are living with almost 55,000 foster families. The Fostering Network estimates that a further 9,070 foster families are needed in the next 12 months alone, in order to ensure all fostered children can live with the right family for them.

Fostering Network 2016

Oxfordshire County Council

The number of newly approved carers over the last 6 years has been consistent, in the last 2 years the range of foster carer approvals has increased resulting in improved placement choice providing increased number of placements for siblings, teenagers and young people requiring long term fostering. There is a need to constantly recruit new carers due to the fact that a number of carers leave the service each year, for genuine reasons.

The total number of unrelated carers approved previously:

2010-13 = 113

2013-16 = 119

Successes

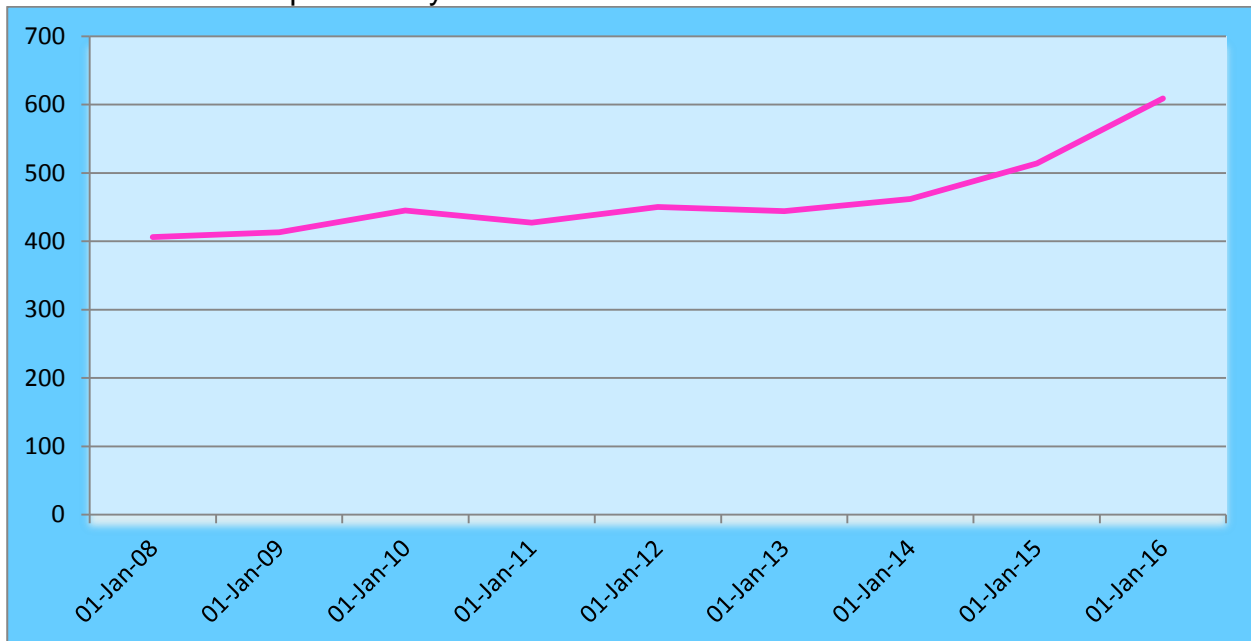
We maintain a high level of enquiries by having a long term strategy for marketing and advertising in conjunction with targeted recruitment campaigns, alongside a robust process for recruitment.

There have been a number of key activities that have taken place:

- Dedicated county recruitment team, that is managed centrally which has improved the timeliness of allocations and the ability to track from enquiry stage through to approval
- Long term campaign on Heart FM has been successful in building brand awareness, and creating customer loyalty
- As a result of the successful rebranding we won the Oxfordshire Business award for marketing excellence. The entrance was the rebrand during 2014 which gave a vibrant, modern look with the aim to open up people's minds that they could foster. For many reasons people rule themselves out of both fostering and adoption believing that they would not be eligible to apply - it is our job to ensure that we increase awareness and encourage them to apply.
- Introduced "Jake" a new publicity campaign to increase the number of foster cares for teenagers. The campaign included video, radio and press content
- Introduction of Supported Lodgings offering assisted housing for over 18's
- Introduction of the Mockingbird support model to offer increased support to foster carers.

Children Looked After Figures

We have seen a high increase in the number of LAC in the last 18 months. Around 50% of the LAC population are over the age of 12. We have also seen a 25% increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers in the last 12 months..



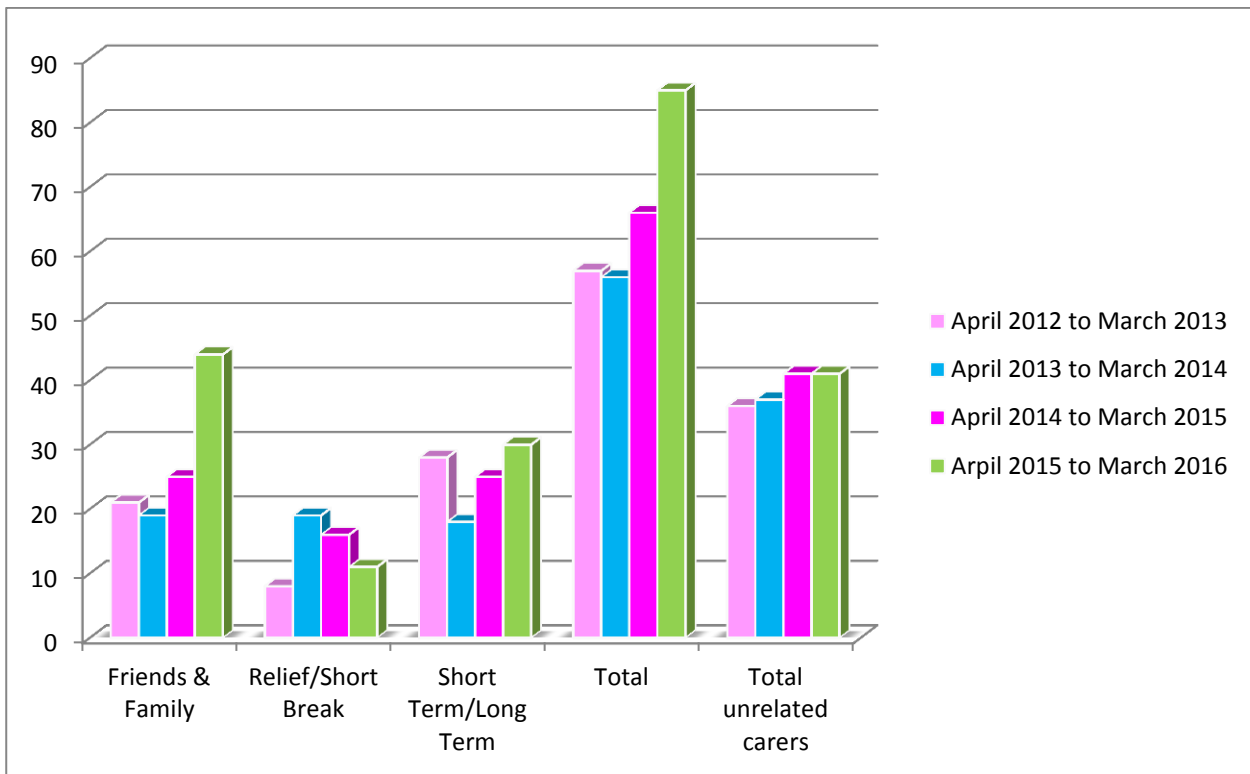
At 31/03/08 - 406 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/09 - 413 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/10 - 445 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/11 - 427 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/12 - 450 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/13 - 444 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/14 - 462 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/15 - 514 Looked After Children
 At 31/03/16 - 609 Looked After Children

Numbers of Foster carer Approvals

The total number of approvals rose significantly in 2015/16 due to the number of F&F carers approved. We saw a rise in the number of mainstream carers in 2013/14 and since then numbers have remained consistent. However the range of approvals has improved significantly offering more placements for older children and siblings.

The breakdown of approvals over the last 4 years is:

	Friends & Family carers	Relief/Short Break	Short Term /Long Term	Total	Total unrelated carers
April 2012 to March 2013	21	8	28	57	36
April 2013 to March 2014	19	19	18	56	37
April 2014 to March 2015	25	16	25	66	41
April 2015 to March 2016	44	11	30	85	41



Enquiries

The number of initial enquires continues to be positive. The table below shows the percentage of enquiries that result in approval and the conversion rate, which is favourable to the national average of 1 in 10:

Note: the approval and enquiries do not necessarily relate to one another

Year	Enquiries	Approvals	percentage	Conversion Rate
2013/14	169	37	22%	1 in 4.6
2014/15	192	41	21%	1 in 4.7
2015/16	211	41	20%	1 in 5.2

Initial home visits

The number of initial home visits completed has increased steadily over the last 3 years:

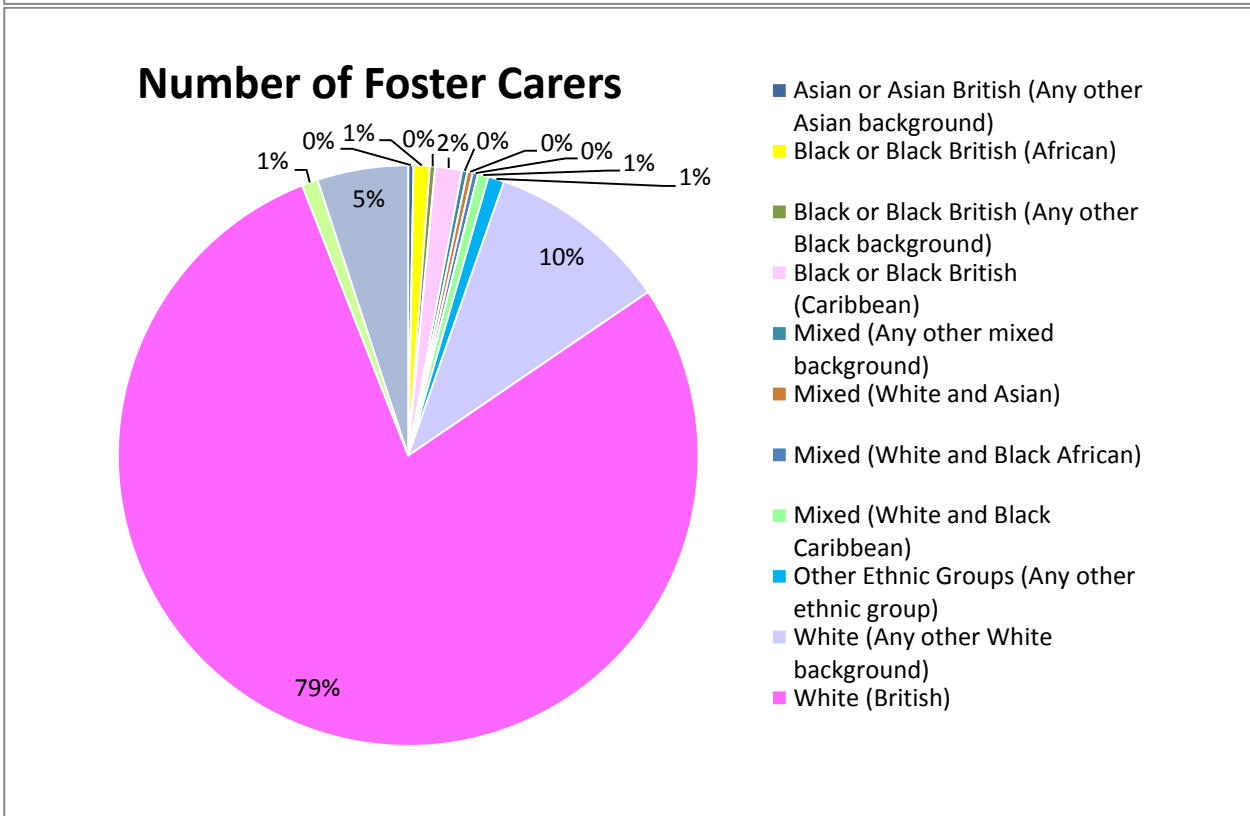
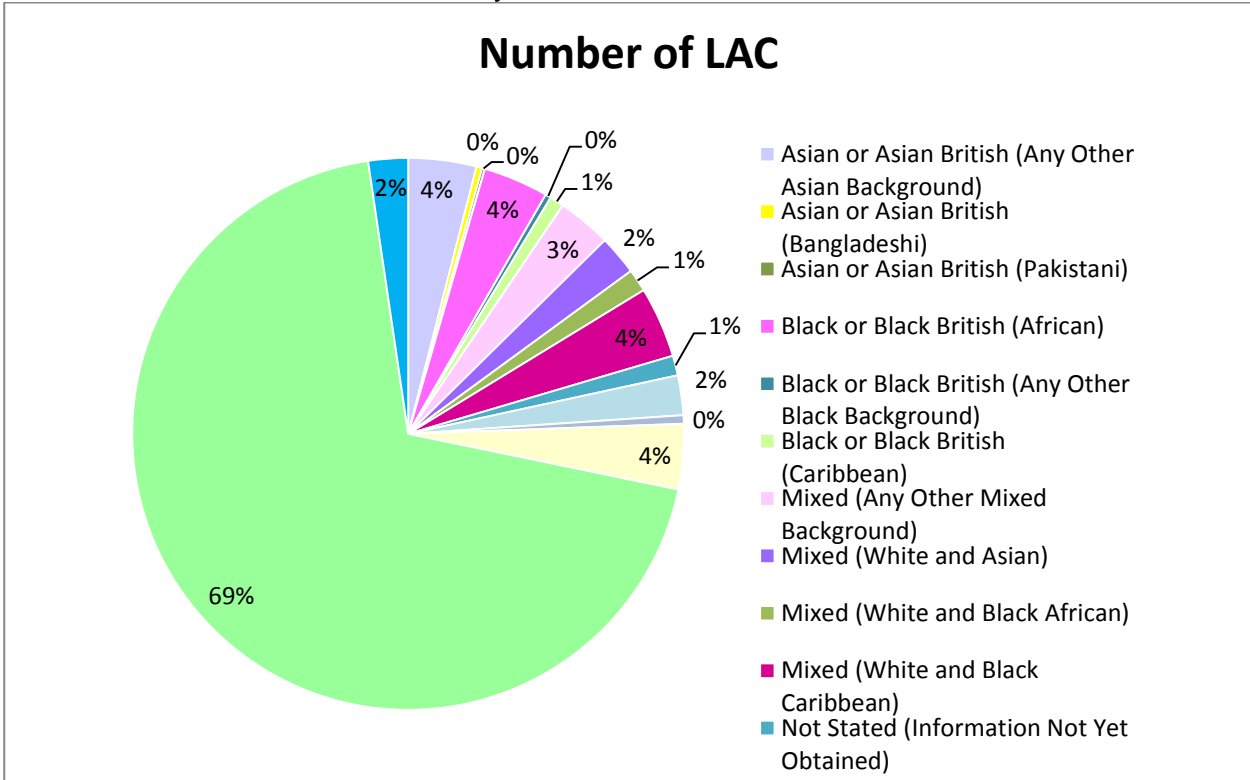
Year	IHV's	Assessments Started	Number of IHV's that have progressed to assessment
2013/14	128	53	1 in every 2.4
2014/15	145	60	1 in every 2.4
2015/16	129	50	1 in every 2.6

County Recruitment Team

The county recruitment team was formed in 2015/16, it was decided that in order for the recruitment process to be made as sleek as possible we needed to have dedicated SW's whose role was to carry out IHV's, preparation training and the assessments of new mainstream carers. After approval foster carers are transferred to a SSW in the Fostering teams.

BME

The tables below show the ethnicity of foster carers and LAC as of 31st March 2016.



As is true nationally, recruitment of BME carers remains a priority. Better links with religious and cultural sectors would help reduce lack of understanding, tension and isolation of certain groups and access to more carers to ensure better racial matches for children requiring foster care.

There has been an increase in unaccompanied asylum seekers. The increase has resulted in total 48 unaccompanied children and young people in Oxfordshire. Some will be placed in foster care if they are under age of 18.

Competition

An increasingly competitive market means potential foster carers are offered a wider choice and we need to ensure that we are foremost in offering the preferred local option. Encouragingly OCC continues to attract carers transferring from IFAs and historically does not lose existing carers to IFAs. Private agencies advertise both nationally and locally.

Strategy

Approach

Oxfordshire's aim is to recruit a pool of foster carers to improve placement choice and availability and meet the diverse needs of our Looked After children. In order to achieve this we have a multi-faceted marketing approach as detailed in the marketing plan. See Appendix 1

Publicity and marketing activity will not exclude anyone due to Gender, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity, Cultural needs, disability, sexual orientation, or relative social or economic status. Recruitment practices comply with Oxfordshire County Council's policies and procedures including Oxfordshire County Council's Equality and Diversity framework. The use of translation service for publications or face to face will be offered when required.

TARGETED RECRUITMENT

Timing - It is crucial that we have a targeted approach to recruitment activity which needs to be ongoing with primary focus at key times:

BME - Our experience has shown that recruitment in the BME groups is best achieved through word of mouth by working with our existing BME carers and within the local BME community. We have seen over time a community of carers who are able to offer placements for UASC and build on this also via word of mouth alongside other relevant campaigns such as Refugee Week.

Out of County - We will continue to have a targeted approach in order to meet the needs of harder to place children i.e. children with significant health needs and older children. We will invite applications from out of county if the offer is for our priority groups who live close enough in order for us to provide a high level of support services.

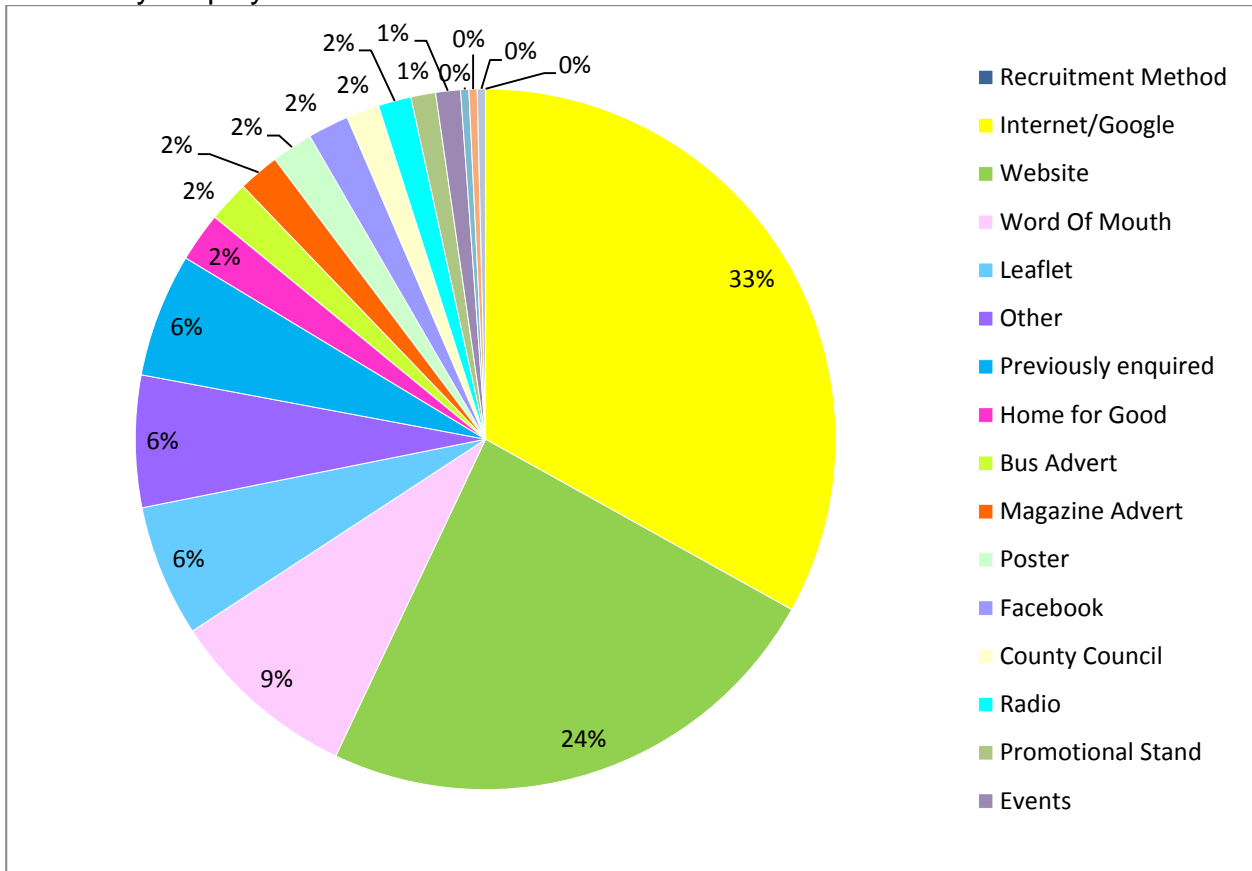
Summary on Approach

The council has a recruitment strategy, which is reviewed regularly in order to prioritise the recruitment of foster carers according to the needs of Oxfordshire children. We regularly review the marketing plan and activity that takes place.

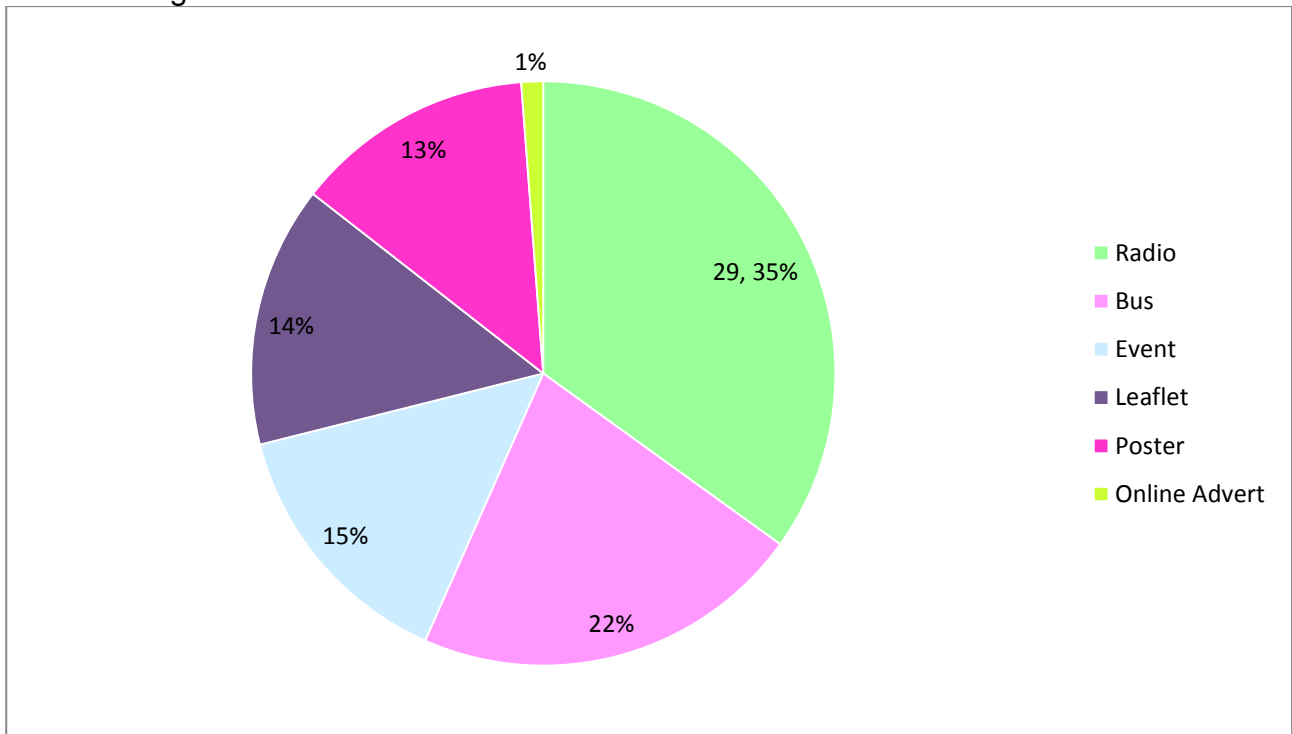
Communication Tools

Marketing tools

The following table shows where prospective carers state they have found our details from when they enquiry.



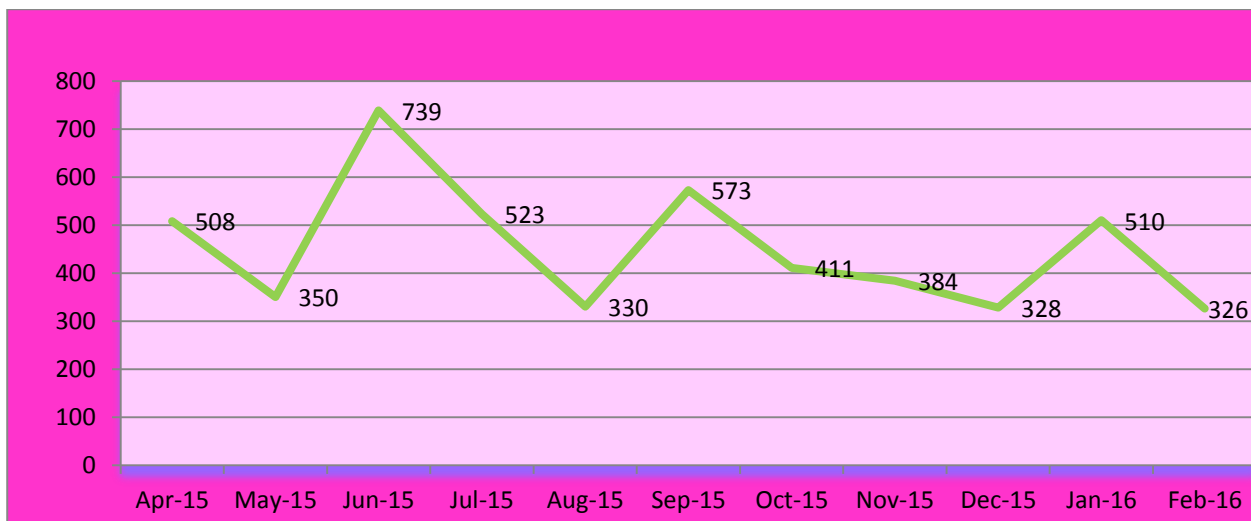
The following table shows where prospective carers have seen or heard our publicity prior to contacting us.



Online

We know that the website continues to be the chosen channel for customers to obtain supporting information before following up with an online application or request an information brochure by telephone. We continue to drive traffic to the website through online advertising, links, social media, and via all publicity. We include a QR code on our publicity to give the facility for users to be linked straight to the website via their mobile phone. We have added interesting interactive content to our fostering and adoption webpages including a number of videos and children's profiles.

Chart showing the website traffic on the fostering pages over the last year - increases fits with our campaign activities



Social Media

The fostering & adoption Facebook page was launched in 2014 along with Twitter and YouTube. Social networking forums are an effective and efficient way of creating a sense of community with our customers and our foster carers. It allows us to have an interactive and interesting way of communicating our messages.

Word of Mouth

Approved foster carers play a key role in recruitment as word of mouth proves to be successful in a number of ways:

- Carers promote and encourage the need for more foster families by discussing with family, friends, colleagues
- Carers provide media opportunities by providing inspiring stories
- Carers take part in attending information meetings/preparation training

Foster carers are encouraged to get involved in recruitment by having an incentive scheme for any foster carer who introduces a new carer once they are approved. Currently the fee is £250. A number of carers have been recruited from family and friends of existing carers. The Carer Coordinators also play a key role in recruitment initiatives. The incentive of £250 has been opened up to all OCC employees as the council is now a fostering friendly employer and is encouraging all of its employees to take a responsibility to raise awareness and recruit new cares.

Brand awareness

All promotional material displays the fostering brand to build and maintain strong brand awareness. The branding includes the Oxfordshire County Council logo and the fostering & adoption logo. All publicity retains these 2 components and colours but differs in look for targeted campaigns, ie Jake, teenage fostering. The artwork is created in-house (Recruitment Team) using InDesign.



Call to Action

All advertising and publicity has a clear call for action directing customers to either or both the freephone number and the fostering website.

Partnership Working

Strong links have been built with our neighbouring authorities and the consortium meet regularly to share good practice, knowledge and key information with regard to recruitment, regulations, guidance and standards.

The fostering friendly campaign was launched to encourage local businesses and organisations to commit to support their employees who foster and to also by becoming a fostering friendly employer or to raise awareness within their organisation by becoming a fostering friendly business. Organisations who have signed up include;

- Oxfam
- Milletts Farm
- Oxford City Council
- Home for Good
- Bishop of Dorchester
- Fitzwaryn School - The Propeller Academy Trust

Recruitment Process

Enquiry Stage

The role of the Enquiry Officer is pivotal to the recruitment process. The Enquiry Officer is the first person a potential applicant speaks to and continues to follow each applicant through the process at each stage maintaining a strong link with the customer. In addition to this the role is pivotal in tracking and maintaining information on each applicant from enquiry to approval.

Recruitment Process

We provide a seamless process for recruiting foster carers. The process has a target date of 26 weeks from initial enquiry to panel date. IHV's are booked in at first phone call when appropriate and are done within 10 working days. Information meetings are optional and preparation training takes place during the assessment. Approved foster carers are involved throughout the process, by attending information meetings, IHV's and also at preparation training. We provide information in a timely way ensuring that applicants feel valued throughout the process and that the process continues to be responsive to the customer's needs. See Appendix 2

Tracking, Reporting

It is necessary to record all data on all applicants who contact us. Applicants are tracked throughout the process and data collated for analysis.

Feedback/Evaluation

Enquirers/Applicants are asked for feedback during different stages of the recruitment process. Approved foster carers are also asked for feedback. Exit interviews are given to all foster carers who are deregistered to provide feedback. This feedback is evaluated to help inform future planning.

Summary of planned activity for 2016-19

We will focus activities on achieving our key aims and objectives. Which are:

- To increase the number of foster carers to meet the needs of the LAC needing placements
- The target for approving 135 carers in the next 3 years
- To focus on advertising and publicity that convey key messages and drive people to the website
- To use training and development to increase the capacity of foster carers

FOSTERING AND ADOPTION

Marketing Plan 2016/17

Objectives are:

- To provide an effective, high quality and best value fostering and adoption service to meet the needs and numbers of the looked after population
 - To improve placement choice and stability for children and young people, by:
 - increasing the number of in-house county foster carers
 - increasing the number of adopters including adopters from out of county if their offer fits with our priority needs
 - increasing the number of foster carers in particular for
 - children over 12 yrs old
 - other specialised areas ie Parent & Baby
 - increasing the number of adopters and foster carers in particular for
 - sibling groups
 - disabled children
 - older children
1. The marketing plan is a multi-faceted approach and fits alongside the Recruitment Strategies 2016 to 2019. The plan will be revised on an annual basis.
 2. The key objectives are to raise the awareness of OCC's fostering and adoption service. To recruit more foster carers and adoptive parents. Recruiting carers and adoptive parents who represent the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of Oxfordshire's Looked After Children (LAC) in order to give better placement choice.
 3. To advertise and promote the service via media, social media, internet , publicity materials and outdoor advertising, Directing clients to a dedicated freephone number or to our website online form, answered by the Enquiry Officer providing an effective and efficient front line service to all clients.
 4. Ensuring all information is clear and consistent establishing brand awareness and removing perceived barriers from potential carers or adoptive parents.
 5. A key message is that Fostering or Adoption is open to anyone regardless of age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, disability or gender.
 6. Promoting awareness within the community by combined activities: attending events, online community websites, and targeted publicity campaigns. This activity will be coordinated by the Marketing and Community Officer working with ambassadors.
 7. To target audiences to consider the needs of the service: fostering for teenagers, disabled children, parent and baby placements, carers for long term fostering, Short Break Scheme, also adopters who are open to all children including over 5 yrs, siblings and children with a learning or physical disability and from the local BME communities.
 8. Activities planned.
 - a. Radio advertising –at key times, work with Heart FM and Jack FM

- b. Social media strategy - including Facebook, Twitter etc.
- c. Press advertising –adverts in local papers/magazines placed at key times
- d. OCC Fostering & adoption web pages - review and update
- e. Online advertising - PPC and Facebook & Google advertising - monthly
- f. Eshots at key times
- g. Online advertising example Netmums, Gumtree, Oxford Mail/Times, local businesses
- h. Create media interest with press releases including stories from carers
- i. Outreach events targeting key areas in the county
- j. Royal mail leafleting to coincide with community events in key areas
- k. Carer Coordinators to be involved in recruitment as role of Fostering Ambassadors
- l. Advertising on 3 buses, mega rears, on a long term basis, 1 year contracts renewed annually
- m. Additional advertising on buses at specific campaign times
- n. Advertising on poster sites at Tesco's store - Banbury/Oxford - annual contract
- o. Outdoor posters situated in key sites across the county - annual contract
- p. 2 large displays in JR Hospital Oxford (free site) includes leaflet and posters
- q. 7 Community hospitals for information outlets across county
- r. Distribution posters & leaflets direct to schools, dentists/doctors, CAB, Coffee Shops, Garden Centres, Conference Centres, Leisure Centres, Childrens centres via mail outs 3 times per year
- s. Produce publicity reinforcing brand awareness
- t. National campaigns eg. Share the Care Week, Foster Care Fortnight and Adoption Week - leaflet/poster distribution, media campaign, events, press/radio/online advertising
- u. Targeted campaigns for priority needs ie fostering teenagers, parent & baby
- v. Foster Friendly campaign

This is a balanced approach through long term and short term advertising and marketing, increasing levels at key times to maximise results. Also by working within the local community being more accessible and increasing partnership working.

9. Evaluation:

- Monitor numbers of applicants throughout all stages
- Monitor number of Carers/Adoptive Parents approved
- Monitor number of visits to the website
- Report on marketing information from customer contact "where did you get our contact details? Where else have you seen our publicity?"
- Feedback from prospective Carers/Adoptive Parents at information meetings and preparation training
- Monitor feedback on the demographics of applicants

Follow up applicants who have:

- Chosen not to formally apply due to it not being the right time by email to see if they wish to proceed, when appropriate. Collect online contact details via online registration form in order to send email newsletter.
- Drop out during the assessment due to change of circumstances followed when appropriate. Collect details from enquiry spreadsheet.

10. Budget for 2016/17: £93,566

Long term campaigns:

- (£11.5K) 3 x mega rears on buses on 12 month contracts
- (£4K) Outdoor poster sites on 12 month contracts
- (£2.5k) Advertising on Cherwell Link and Your Oxford - 12 months
- (£2.5K) PPC and FB advertising - 12 month contracts

Specific campaigns

MAY (£8.5k) "Foster care fortnight" – May 16th-29th May

- £1500 Heart Upweight
- £1000 Jack/Jack 2 - 2 weeks
- £4000 Bus backs (4 weeks)
- £1000 Press/Mags
- £500 Facebook, Online
- £500 Creative

JULY-SEPT (£14k) "Teenage campaign" – 3 months

- £9000 Heart - week on week off
- £3000 Jack/Jack 2 - week on week off (alternate with Heart)
- £1000 Press/Mags
- £500 Facebook, Online
- £500 Creative

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER (£9K) "Adoption Week" - October or November

- £2000 Heart
- £5000 Jack (Local Takeover - estimate)
- £1000 Press/magazines
- £500 Facebook, online
- £500 Creative

DECEMBER/JANUARY (£15k) Xmas/New year campaign

- £4000 Bus Backs (4 weeks)
- £6000 RADIO – Heart/Jack/Jack 2
- £1000 Press/Mags
- £500 Facebook, online
- £3000 Eshot or mail out (Christmas Card)
- £500 Creative

Community Campaigns (£3.5k)

3 times per year - in specific areas in the county to include royal mail leaflet distribution.

Total planned spend for 2016/17 = £70.5k

Additional costs will occur - printing, town hall bookings etc.

11. Campaign detail

Community Campaigns

Are a combination of creating an online presence via community websites/Facebook etc. Leaflet drops will advertise an event where fostering ambassadors and staff will be present, ie find out more about fostering - come to your local café and meet with foster carers. Use local cafes as possible venues. Contacts sourced via foster carers who live in the area. Put up posters and stand in the community. Timetable of areas to be planned by Marketing & Community Officer, when in post but possible dates are:

Bicester	June 16
Didcot	September
Chipping Norton	December

Recruitment Campaigns

Campaign dates:

Fostering Friendly campaign	Currently ongoing - needs discussion
Foster Care Fortnight	16-29 May16
Refugee Week	June 2016
Private fostering week	July 2016
Teenagers campaign	July to September 2016
Adoption Week	November 16
Christmas Campaign	December 2016 & January 2017
LGBT Week	February 2017
Disability fostering	March 2017

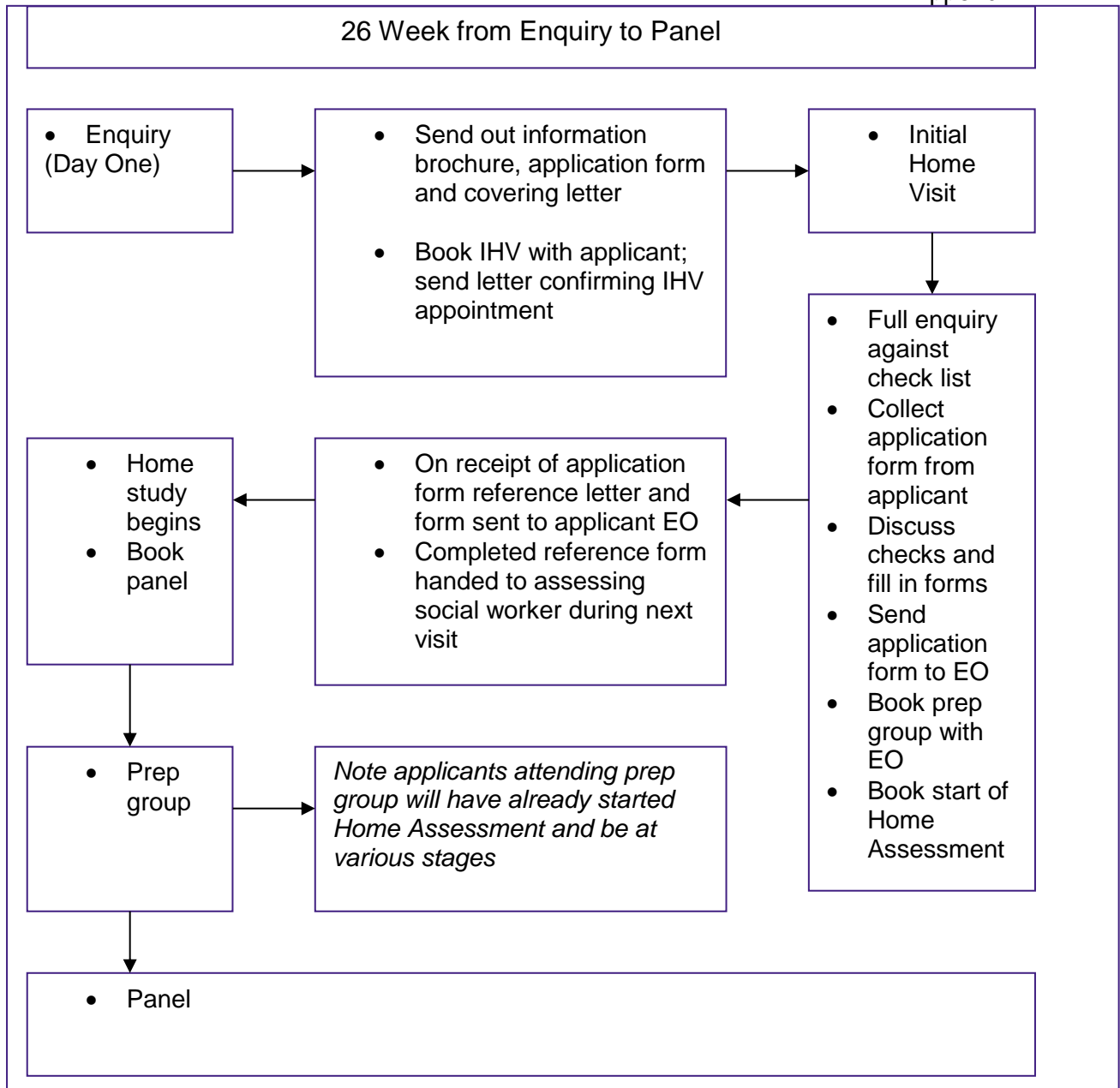
12. Timescales

Key	Increased activity for specific campaigns			Ongoing activity			Happens as and when throughout year			Community activity		
Activity	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
Campaigns		Foster care Fortnight	Refugee Week	Private fostering Week	Teenage fostering Campaign		Adoption Week		Christmas Campaign		LGBT Week	Disability
Newspapers/ Magazine advertising	Reduced activity through the year											
Online advertising												
Google & Facebook advertising	12 month contract											
Press Releases												
Radio targeted campaigns												
Website development and update	On going											
Buses - mega rears	12 month contract for 3 buses											

Bus - targeted campaigns												
Tesco's poster site	12 month contract											
Display at JR Hospital	arranged on-going booking											
Poster/leaflet distribution in community hospitals	12 month contract											
Poster Sites across the county	12 month contract											
Posters/leaflets distribution to Doctors etc												
Community Campaigns			Bicester	Dalton Barracks		Didcot	Benson RAF		Chipping Norton		Brize Norton	
Specific campaign	Fostering Friendly Campaign											
Display	Displays to be booked in at various sites											
Events			Gay Pride	Cowley Road Carnival			Banbury Canal Day					
	Play Days across the county											

Enquiry Process

Appendix 2



EO = Enquiry Officer

Information Meetings to be held every 2 months these meetings are open meetings and advertised on the OCC fostering web pages. Applicants who have enquired will be invited to attend if they wish to do so. But this is not necessary part of an applicant's progression.

Preparation Training sessions are held 9 times a year although this figure can be reviewed to meet the needs of the number of applicants being processed. Applicants will be invited to attend training once agreed with the assessing Social Worker, this can be during assessment.

Formal Applications can be made once a SW agrees; applicants do not have to wait until after attending prep.