

Children’s Social Care

Croydon Fostering Service - Annual Report 2025/26



WE ARE
CROYDON

CONTENTS	Page
Purpose of the Annual Report	2
Key Messages	2
Background Information	4
Role of the fostering service	5
The National Fostering Context	6
Children in Foster Care in Croydon	6
Changes in Age Profile	7
Ethnicity of Looked After Children and Carers	8
Inhouse Carer Numbers, Capacity and Utilisation	8
Croydon 's Provision of Foster Carers	8
Foster Homes and Stability	10
Friends and Family Foster Carers	11
Service Structure	12
Foster Carer Recruitment Activity	13
Training and Development	16
Support for Foster Carers	17
Staying Put	18
The Fostering Panel	18
Review of Development Plans	19
Service Priorities	20
Complaints	20
Appendix 1	
Chair's Annual Report of the Fostering Panel 2025/2026	

PURPOSE OF ANNUAL REPORT

1. The purpose of this document is to report on the activity of the Fostering Service fulfilling obligations in the Fostering Services Regulations (2011) to review and improve the quality of care, and National Minimum Standards (2011) to report to the executive side of the Local Authority. It will cover performance and developments in the council's delivery of Fostering Services; how the council is compliant with key national minimum standards; the service offered to those seeking to foster and those children in the care of the Local Authority who are fostered. This report details the work of Croydon Council Fostering Service from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026 and sets out plans for service development until 31st March 2027.

KEY MESSAGES

2. 2025/26 was a year balanced with consolidation and transformation. Croydon moved from service improvement into a sustainable model focused on placement sufficiency, kinship care growth, recruitment effectiveness and the development of a skilled and supported fostering workforce capable of meeting the increasingly complex needs of children and young people in care.
3. Croydon's fostering service has continued to make significant progress this year in the delivery of Fostering services and support to Foster carers. Strong permanence planning, dedicated support for foster carers, and a deeply committed team have laid a solid foundation for children in care to thrive. This progress reflects the ongoing commitment to create stable, loving foster homes where every child feels safe and supported and carers are expertly supervised.
4. Croydon has made significant investment in the fostering service to ensure that foster carers feel valued, recognised and supported in the increasingly complex and skilled role they undertake. This investment reflects Croydon's belief that children achieve the best outcomes when cared for by well-supported foster carers who are equipped with the skills, confidence and resources to meet their needs.
5. One of the most significant developments this year has been the introduction of Croydon's new foster carer offer. This includes enhanced fostering fees, the introduction of Skilled, Advanced and Specialist fostering pathways, council tax reimbursement, and retention payments. These changes represent one of the largest investments in fostering support made by the Council and illustrates the goal of becoming the fostering agency of choice for carers in and around Croydon.
6. Croydon has continued to strengthen foster carer recruitment activity, achieving the highest number of fostering enquiries recorded in recent years. Through the successful implementation of the Customer Relationship Management system, targeted marketing campaigns and Croydon Fostering Week. Croydon has

significantly increased the number and quality of prospective carers progressing through assessment. This has created a strong pipeline of future foster carers and supports Croydon's ambition to reduce reliance on external fostering provision.

7. Croydon has made substantial progress in supporting children to remain within their family networks wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so. The continued growth of the Family and Friends service has enabled more children to be cared for by people within their extended networks, maintaining important relationships and strengthening their sense of identity and belonging. Supporting foster carers remains central to Croydon's vision. During the year Croydon has expanded opportunities for peer support, mentoring, reflective practice and therapeutic consultation. The development of the Horizon Hubs and enhanced support networks is helping to create a connected fostering community where carers can learn from one another, share experiences and access support when they need it most.
8. It is recognised that many of the children who come into care have experienced trauma, loss and adversity. In response, Croydon has continued to strengthen the trauma-informed approach to fostering, investing in therapeutic support, specialist training and adolescent-focused interventions to help carers meet increasingly complex needs and promote stability.
9. The MySkills assessment framework was introduced to identify the skills and areas of development for carers,
10. A universal training programme run by the Positive Support Group was introduced in Croydon. The focus of the service was to support both the young person and their foster carer to help support and develop resilience and stability, all carers are expected to complete this training.
11. The objective of the training is to increase carers ability to successfully support young people to manage their challenging and complex behaviours, with the aim of reducing unplanned endings and increasing resilience, confidence, capacity and positive outcomes for both the young person and carers/providers.
12. This year the Positive Support Group has trained 54 foster carers with another 52 carers with courses in progress.
13. The Croydon fostering panel has continued to provide robust independent oversight and quality assurance. Panel membership has been strengthened, increased diversity and local representation, improved business planning and reduced cancellations, ensuring timely and effective decision-making in the best interests of children and young people and avoiding delay in the approval of new and transferring foster carers.
14. The child's voice is paramount. Croydon has remained committed to listening to children, young people and foster carers. Their experiences continue to shape service development and influence how we deliver support, training and

opportunities for participation. The Croydon Fostering Service remains determined to ensure that the voices of children and young people are at the centre of everything we do and ambassadors from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) offer invaluable consultation and assistance to the service in the areas of marketing, recruitment and training.

15. The Practice Improvement Consultant (PIC) supports practice development, quality assurance and continuous improvement by providing practice expertise, professional support and constructive challenge to the Head of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers and Supervising Social Workers. Through audits, dip sampling, thematic reviews, performance analysis and training, the PIC identifies strengths, areas for development and learning opportunities, promotes reflective practice, and supports the delivery of high-quality, child-centred work.
16. This year the PICs undertook reviews on PDPs, Unannounced Visits, review of foster carer survey, training for staff and Practice Weeks that included workshops for staff and carers on important topics in social care.
17. As the Fostering Service looks ahead to 2026-27, the vision is clear. Croydon will continue to grow a skilled, supported and diverse fostering community, increase the number of local foster homes, strengthen permanence planning, reduce reliance on external provision and ensure that every child in our care has the opportunity to grow up in a stable, loving and safe family environment. Croydon will continue to embrace innovation and respond proactively to the emerging national fostering reform program, ensuring that local practice reflects the latest evidence, national standards and sector developments whilst remaining ambitious in improving outcomes for children, young people, families and foster carers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

18. When a child enters care, it marks one of the most significant and life-altering moments they may experience. It is essential that foster families provide not just adequate, but exceptional care; particularly for children who have faced trauma. As part of its commitment to building a better future for vulnerable children and families, Croydon Council is dedicated to ensuring that every child grows up in a safe, stable, and loving home. For those who cannot remain with or safely return to their birth families or extended family networks, high-quality foster care offers the best chance to experience the warmth and security of a family setting while long-term plans for their future are developed.
19. The Fostering Service supports children in the care of the Local Authority, including those on short breaks. Its core mission is to promote stability by ensuring children and young people are placed in secure, nurturing foster homes when foster care is the identified care plan. The service plays a vital role in placing children with foster carers who are located within, or as close as possible to, the borough helping maintain community connections and continuity in their lives.

ROLE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

20. The Fostering Service in Croydon is responsible for:

- I. Support, supervision and training of foster carers, including early permanence and family and friend carers.
- II. Ensuring provision of local safe and supportive foster homes in accordance with fostering national minimum standards
- III. Promoting stability and permanence planning for our children
- IV. Recruitment and assessment of new foster carers
- V. Support of Special Guardianship Carers
- VI. Private Fostering

21. The priorities are to ensure that:

- I. All children who become looked after by Croydon council have experience of safe, secure and consistent care.
- II. All children experience a safe place within which they can play, grow, grow, thrive and are supported to reach their full potential.
- III. The holistic needs of the child are addressed and supported through health, education and social development, enhancing opportunities to develop resilience and achieve.
- IV. Support for early permanence for children in care and to ensure that children who cannot safely remain at home are offered a permanent family base without undue delay.

22. Croydon benefits from a diverse group of foster carers, each bringing a wide range of skills and experience to support children in need. They provide various types of care, including short breaks and respite, long-term fostering, and support for transitions to return to their parent(s) care or to permanent homes through adoption. In addition, the service assesses and supports relatives or close family friends, known as Family and Friends foster carers (also referred to as Kinship or Connected Persons), who wish to care for children within their extended family or social network. All foster carers receive regular supervision and guidance from Supervising Social Workers within the fostering teams, along with access to ongoing training and development opportunities.

23. According to Ofsted statistics (Main findings: fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025), as of March 2025 there were 56,345 approved mainstream foster carers in England. This represents a further decrease of 1% from the previous year (57,065) and a 12% reduction since 2021 (63,890), demonstrating the continuing national challenge in recruiting and retaining foster carers. While the national rate of decline has slowed compared with previous years, the number of foster carers continues to fall against a backdrop of increasing demand for foster homes. Nationally, the Government has recognised this challenge in its policy paper *Renewing Fostering: Homes for 10,000 More Children* programme, which aims to strengthen support for foster carers, modernise fostering services and increase fostering capacity across England.

24. The number of 'mainstream' carers in Croydon reduced by 2.5% this year reflecting the national challenge, however the number of **all** carers increased by 9% due to the 76% increase in Family and Friends foster carers from 21 to 37.

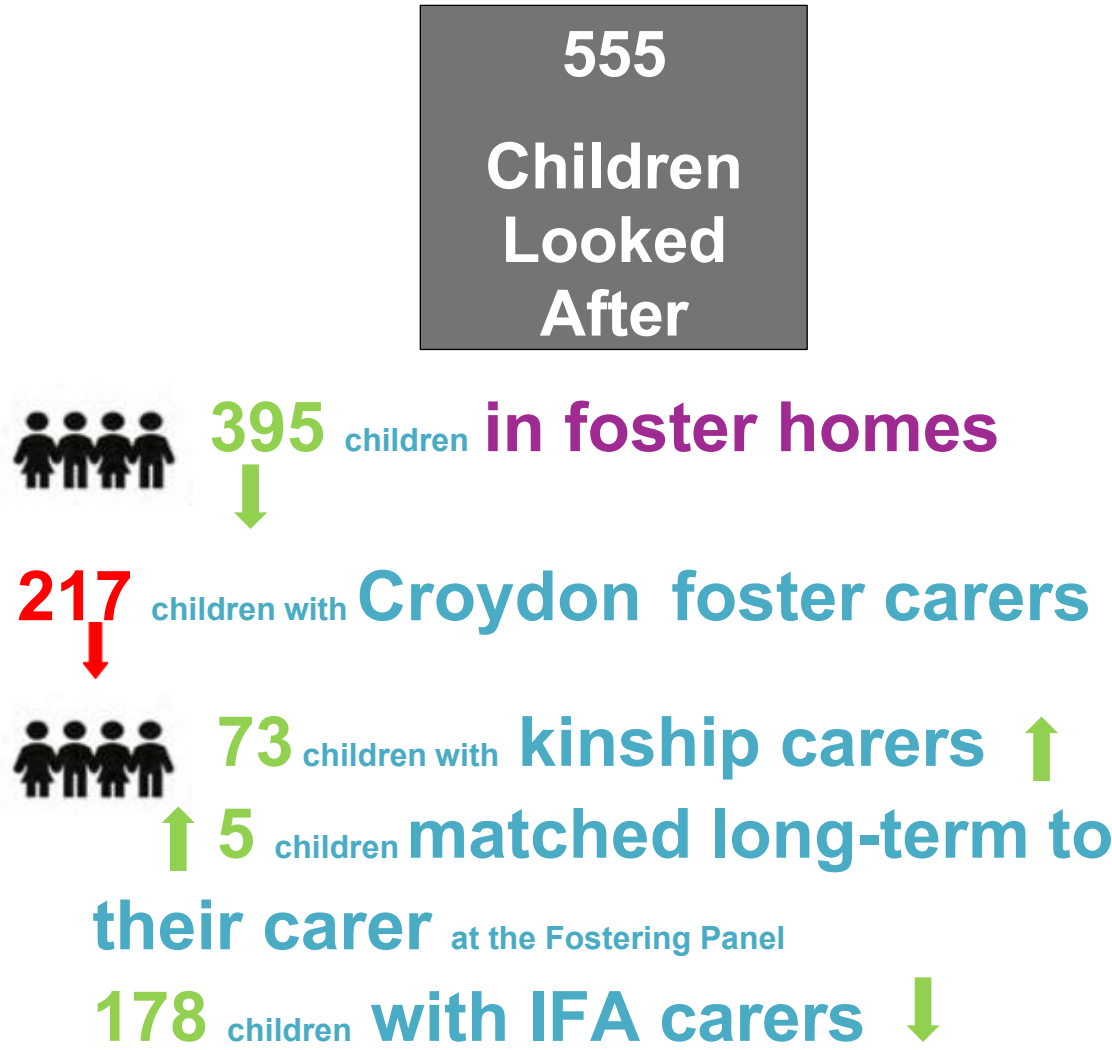
THE NATIONAL FOSTERING CONTEXT

- There were 81,770 children looked after in England on 31 March 2025, a decrease of 2% from 83,630 in 2024, although numbers remain significantly higher than a decade ago.
- 54,820 children were living with foster families on 31 March 2025, meaning fostering remains the most common placement type for children in care.
- There were approximately 42,190 fostering households in England at 31 March 2025. Although this represents a slight improvement on previous years, the sector continues to face significant recruitment and retention challenges.

25. Nationally, the continuing shortage of foster carers reinforces the importance of investment in local recruitment, retention, kinship care, and foster carer support to ensure that children can remain within their communities and experience stable family-based care. Croydon's improvement activity has been developed in response to this context.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN CROYDON

As at the 31st of March 2025, there were:



26. In March 2025 the number of children looked after by Local Authorities in England rose to 81,770, this is a decrease of 2% on the previous year.

27. The trend in Croydon was an increase in children looked after from 549 in 2024 to 555 in 2025 an increase of 1%.

28. The number of children cared for by family and friends increased from 67 in 2024/25 to 70 in 2025/26.

29. The number of children matched long-term through the fostering panel was five, this was lower than expected, however the number of children living with family and friends was significantly higher than previous years indicating that Croydon children are not only achieving matching but are residing with more family and friends.

CHANGING AGE PROFILE

Children with Croydon Foster Carers

Year	Age Group				Total
	a) 0 – 4	b) 5 -10	c) 11 - 15	d) 16 +	
2025/ 2026	37	31	79	70	217
2024/ 2025	38	38	77	69	222
2023/ 2024	41	39	73	76	229
2022/ 2023	33	41	88	84	246

Children with Croydon and IFA Carers combined.

Year	a) 0 - 4	b) 5-10	c) 11-15	d) 16+	Total
2025/ 2026	62	70	137	126	395
2024/ 2025	70	89	144	134	426
2023/ 2024	67	70	136	143	416
2022/ 2023	53	83	159	154	449
2021/ 2022	58	84	169	155	466
2020/ 2021	61	97	199	221	578

30. The largest demographic of children in foster care continues to be those aged over 11 years of age. Data indicates that outside of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, abuse and neglect and families in acute stress were the primary presenting needs. Factors such as the following may have played a role.

- Exposure to extrafamilial harm on young people including child sexual and criminal exploitation.
- Adolescent behavioural challenges
- Breakdown of kinship care arrangements

31. Croydon continues to recognise these pressures and has a multi-agency approach to provide support to young people and families and to ensure the right support and resources are made available to foster carers to meet the needs of all children.

ETHNICITY OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN and FOSTER CARERS IN CROYDON

32. The majority of looked after children in Croydon were either from a White or Black African Caribbean background with a significant number of Asian children.
33. The demographics of foster carers in Croydon are broadly reflective of looked after children enabling Croydon to achieve better matching of children to carers.
34. Work is being embedded to improve the matching of children to carers using the MySkills/ MyNeeds assessments which will enable Croydon to better understand the specific needs of children and the strengths of foster carers.

CROYDON'S PROVISION OF FOSTER CARERS

At 31st March 2026



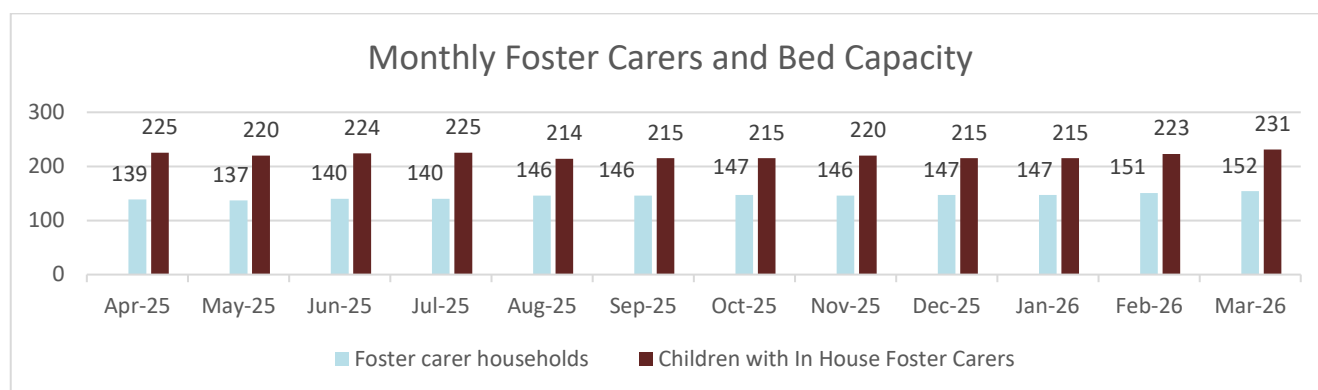
152 approved fostering households

↑ (from 139)

35. In 2025/26 – **31** foster carer households were de-registered (which includes 16 connected carers). **32** carer households were de-registered in 24/25. Data collection on the reasons for deregistration needs to improve within the service to include more categories, at present data largely reflects resignations for various reasons, plus retirements. Connected carers who have been deregistered have been mainly due to ending fostering due to the age of their looked after child or the making of an alternative order (usually a Special Guardianship Order).

Inhouse Carer Numbers, Capacity and Utilisation

Year	Number of Households	Number of Approved Places
2026	152	268
2025	139	249
2024	149	260
2023	176	306
2022	204	355
2021	222	395
2020	241	452
2019	233	451



36. The snapshot at the end of 2025/26 was that there were 231 children with Croydon Foster Carers which shows that Croydon utilised foster carer availability at 86%, this is a slight decrease from the previous year by 3%. If the number of young people in staying put arrangements with foster carers was taken into account (21) utilisation would be 94%.

37. The duty Social Workers and home-finding officer strive to find foster homes for children 'in-house' as a priority, keeping Croydon children in or close to Croydon. 100% utilisation is not realistic or achievable as some carers are approved for short stay/ respite only so would not always have a vacancy, some places may only be available if siblings were in the same foster home and as mentioned above there is also a cohort of 'staying put' young people who are still living in the foster home.

38. The utilisation table above also illustrates the number of in-house Foster Carers in Croydon over the past eight years. The decline in carer numbers is evident particularly after 2021 during the pandemic. Also evident is the emerging trend of the increase of foster carers.

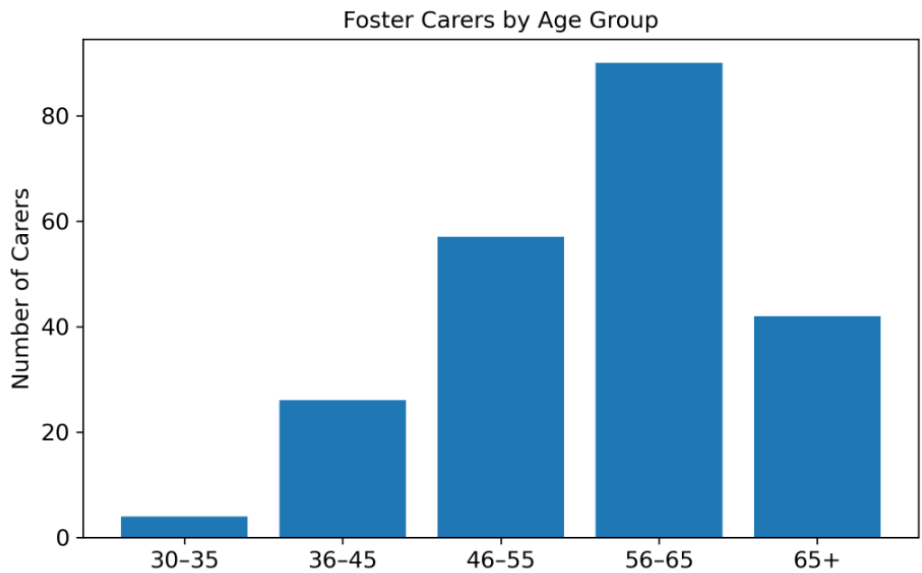
39. Croydon celebrates and appreciates its carers, there are currently 21 foster families who have fostered for over twenty years, four of these have given thirty years' service. They have demonstrated care, commitment and resilience.

40. There is a need to recruit and retain carers who can offer Croydon children a similar level of commitment through their public service as Foster Carers and it is important that the fostering service continues to offer carers appropriate support, supervision and reward and recognition.

41. Twelve of the carers who left Fostering in Croydon last year were over 60 years old (eleven over 60 left in the previous year). In one sense this is positive as this shows that a main reason that foster carer numbers are reducing due in some part to this external factor. However, this does not make the service complacent, and Croydon is focused on improving the support and reward offer to carers which is expected to improve carer retention.

42. With 32 households where the primary foster carers currently registered in Croydon above the age of 65 (49 individuals) it is probable that there will continue to be a comparable number of resignations in relation to retirement in the coming years. Croydon remains committed to the target of net positive recruitment in future.

43. The chart above shows the age groups of Foster Carers and illustrates the need to



continue to recruit the next generation of carers to ensure sufficiency of foster homes in the future.

44. Fostering recruitment will need to target carers who are able to care for a range of children requiring foster homes. This is particularly necessary in order to increase choices for adolescents, large sibling groups, unaccompanied minors and those at risk of child sexual and criminal exploitation. Croydon has a higher rate of first-time entrants into the youth justice system than the London and national average. Many of these young people have been traumatised and their behaviour can reflect this. Many times, these young people enter into care with little warning and Croydon has identified the need to develop a resource that can be used in such emergencies.

45. In addition, we have a number of children with disabilities who have specialist needs and there will be a focus on recruiting foster carers with additional and relevant skills who can offer short break or longer-term care to these vulnerable children.

FOSTER HOMES AND STABILITY

46. The joint work and decision making between the Homefinding Team and fostering has sought to improve the timely identification of in-house foster homes. The liaison between the fostering service and care teams also aims at early identification of the need for a foster home for a child and for support for children in existing fostering arrangements in order to avoid disruption or unplanned endings.

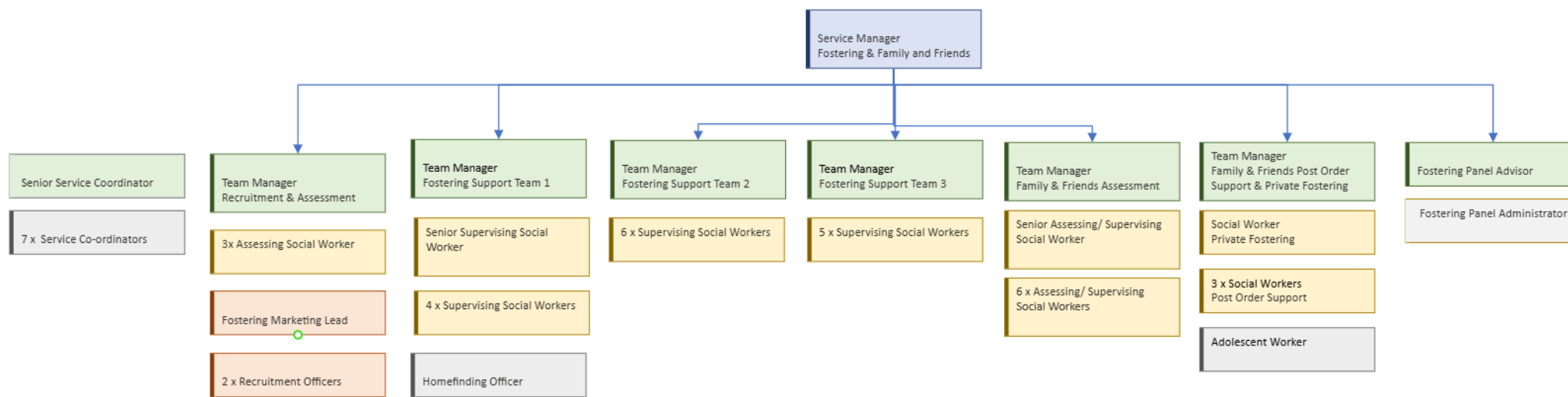
47. Performance for short term stability (Where children have experienced three or more moves) – **7%** (last year was 6%)
48. Long-term stability (those in care for 2.5+ years and in same foster home for 2+ years) **71%** (down from last year which was 76%)
49. In addition to careful matching of children Croydon has a range of support services that can be utilised to ensure placements are supported such as the clinical team that will offer support and clinical consultations prior to placement disruption and specialist practitioner consultant from Young Croydon who offer support for children at risk of exploitation.
50. A new support function has been added to the service with the recruitment of an Adolescent Worker to work with carers and young people to improve stability and relationships in the home and to reduce risks outside of the home. It is expected that the successful candidate will commence their role in the service in early 2025/26. It is important to note that the support of the Adolescent worker will also be available to Special Guardianship carers to ensure these arrangements are also well supported and children remain in their care.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY FOSTER CARERS

51. The Family and Friends teams have a focus on assessing and supporting prospective Special Guardians. As well as assessing friends and family foster carers and presenting them to fostering panel to consider recommending their approval as foster carers. Wherever possible - when the children cannot be reunified with their parents and where there is a positive assessment - the local authority would support them applying for a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) to secure permanence for the children outside of the local authority care system. This approach aligns with the government's kinship strategy.
52. In addition to the Special Guardianship Orders granted in Care Proceedings during 2025/2026 which enabled children to leave care thirty seven Family and Friends Carers were approved at the Fostering Panel compared to twenty-four in 2024/25. This evidences that Croydon continues to successfully implement the national kinship agenda.
53. The increase in approvals at panel was largely due to the practice adopted by the Service Manager in 2023/24 to ensure that all family and friends carers under assessment were presented at the fostering panel so the courts were able to consider making a care order or Special Guardianship Order (SGO) without adding any delay to the court proceedings.

SERVICE STRUCTURE

Croydon Fostering and Family & Friends Service



54. Permanent employees have been appointed to all filled positions in the Fostering Service, this is the second year where there has been a fully permanent workforce in the fostering Service.

55. A Senior supervising Social Worker has been recruited to lead on the foster carer training programme, and one SSW has been moved to the family and friends assessment team from foster carer support to help manage the demand in that part of the service.

56. The caseload of Supervising Social Workers averages around thirteen. However, it is expected that this will initially reduce when supervising social workers return from long-term sick leave but increase gradually with the additional expected foster carer approvals in 2026/27 as a result of the new foster carer offer launched at the end of this year.

57. Post Order Support Social Workers hold active caseloads under Special Guardianship Support Episodes. Following successful recruitment to the vacant Social Worker post, the team now consists of three Special Guardianship Support Social Workers and one Adolescent Support Worker. Whilst this has supported service delivery and reduced caseloads from previous years, Social Workers continue to hold caseloads of approximately 25 children, with demand for Special Guardianship support continuing to increase

58. The Family and Friends assessment team has a mixed caseload of six viability and full assessments (which they have to supervise as foster carers if Reg 24 approval has been granted) with the added pressure of court deadlines for their reports.

FOSTER CARER MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT ACTIVITY

Target Summary:

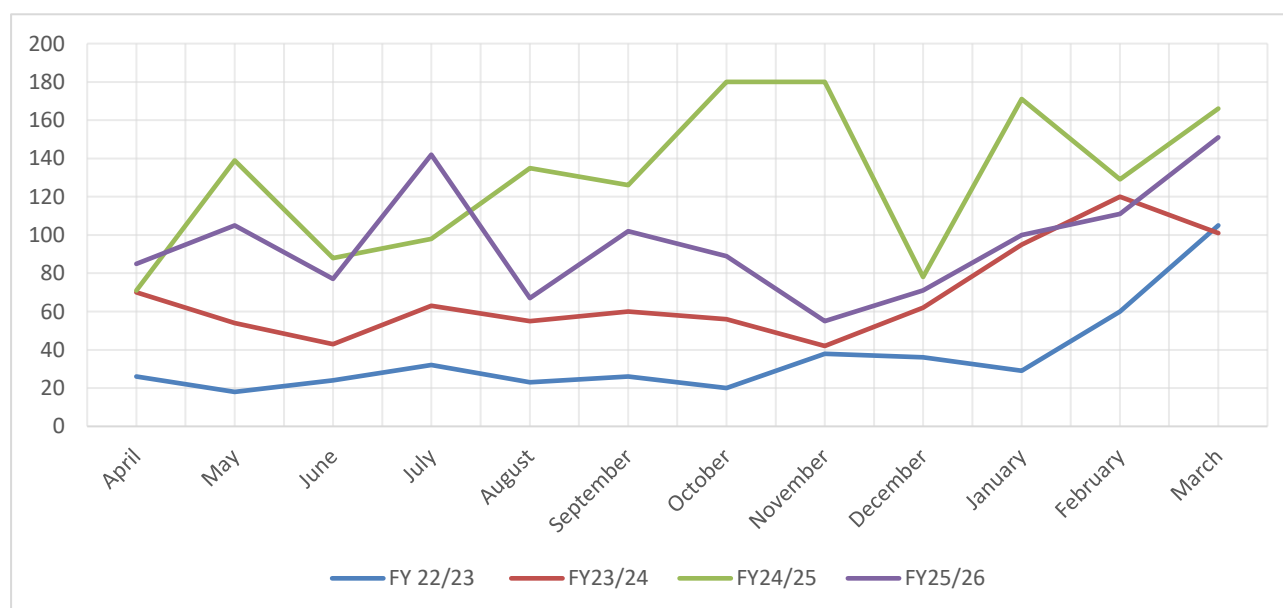
	Total requests for information	Total initial enquiries	Total home visits	Total assessments	Total approvals	Total no. of approved places
Target	300	200	60	30	15	25
2025-26	1079	261	102	65	11	13
2024-25	1472	137	92	44	12	16
2023-24	811	165	62	30	13	20
2022-23	471	184	67	19	11	15
2021-22	330	185	55	27	9	U/K

Against the agreed annual target of 200 initial enquiries, FY 25/26 exceeded this by 30%, achieving 261. Home visits (102) exceeded the target of 60 by 70%, and assessments (65) more than doubled the target of 30. Approvals (11) remain slightly below the target of 15; however, 10 carers remained in active assessment at year end, indicating a positive carry-over position into 2026/27.

Monthly Enquiry Trend

The monthly enquiry trend for 2025/26 tracked consistently above the patterns seen in 2022/23 and 2023/24 throughout the year. The trajectory rose steeply from January through to March, with February and March recording the highest monthly figures (approximately 120 and 150 respectively). This end-of-year surge is a strong positive indicator for the opening months of 2026/27, suggesting the recruitment pipeline is building sustained momentum.

A characteristic dip in activity was visible in December 25, consistent with seasonal behaviour across all years. Proactive planning ahead of this period, using targeted re-engagement activity and scheduled email campaigns will be utilised for 2026/27 to mitigate this seasonal effect.



Activity Conversion Rates:

Stage	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	FY 25-26
Requests for Info → Initial Enquiry	39%	20%	9%	25%
Initial Enquiry → Home Visit	36%	38%	67%	39%
Home Visit → Assessment	28%	48%	48%	64%
Assessment → Approval	63%	43%	27%	17%*
Initial Enquiry → Approval (end-to-end)	6.5%	7.9%	9%	5%**

* Assessment to approval rate reflects in-year completions only; 10 assessments carried over to FY 26/27 will improve this figure upon completion.

** End-to-end conversion rate is expected to improve as carry-over assessments are completed in Q1/Q2 FY 26/27.

Objectives vs Outcomes

Objective	Outcome / Status
Approve 15 new foster carer households	11 approved (73% of target). 10 in active assessment carried into FY 26/27, with a strong likelihood of reaching the annual target once completions are included.
Recruit younger carers (under 40 / under 50)	0 approved under 40. 3 approved under 50. 10 approved under 60. Younger carer recruitment remains a priority area for targeted strategy in FY 26/27.
Increase word of mouth referrals from existing carers	Up 4% year-on-year. Refer a friend reward uplift contributing positively to referral activity.
Increase in-house placements	Target not reached in-year due to Manager on maternity leave and 1 ASW on long term sick. However, 10 assessments carried forward represent a positive pipeline position. All 13 FY 25/26 placements were made in-house.
Increase conversion rate from enquiry to approval	End-to-end rate decreased by 2% in-year. This is partially attributable to the volume of assessments in progress at year end, which will contribute to the FY 26/27 conversion rate.
Establish consistent cost per carer and ROI	Average cost per approved carer: £7,045. ROI vs IFA: £4.78 saved per £1 spent . Framework now in place for ongoing measurement.

59. Despite good performance in recruitment of eleven new foster carers in 2025/26, there were also 31 deregistration's making a net loss of 20 carers.

60. There will inevitably be a loss of Foster Carers each year due to resignation or deregistration. However, the Croydon Foster Service's ambition is to have a net positive recruitment in the near future.

Marketing and Recruitment Activity Summary.

61. The evidence from 2025/26 demonstrates that the current marketing strategy is delivering measurable results and is increasingly well-targeted. The key indicators of a healthy and improving recruitment strategy are as follows:

- Pipeline quality has improved substantially. Initial enquiries (261) exceeded the annual target by 30%, home visits (102) exceeded target by 70%, and assessments (65) more than doubled the target of 30.
- The marketing function is now generating better-qualified leads. The shift in channel investment towards Google Search and targeted digital activity has produced a higher ratio of enquiries that progress meaningfully through the recruitment funnel.
- The in-year cost saving generated by recruiting and placing carers in-house rather than through IFAs is estimated at £382,172, nearly five times the annual marketing budget of £80,000.
- 10 households remain in active assessment as of 31 March 2026. Based on current conversion patterns, a significant proportion of these are expected to achieve approval in Q1 or Q2 of FY 26/27, providing an immediate and strong start to the new year.
- The Refer a Friend incentive has contributed to a 4% increase in word-of-mouth referrals, demonstrating growing confidence and advocacy within the existing carer community.
- The implementation of CRM infrastructure and integrated email marketing has improved the quality and consistency of lead management, contributing to the uplift in enquiry-to-home-visit conversion.

62. Areas for continued focus in 2026/27:

- Younger carer recruitment (under 40 and under 50) remains below target and requires a dedicated campaign strand, potentially including social media-first creative and community outreach.
- Recruitment from the LGBTQ+ community
- The assessment-to-approval conversion rate requires monitoring, with additional support for carers in assessment to reduce attrition at this stage.
- Attraction of Croydon residents who are experienced Foster Carers from IFA with targeted campaigns.

Barriers to Recruitment:

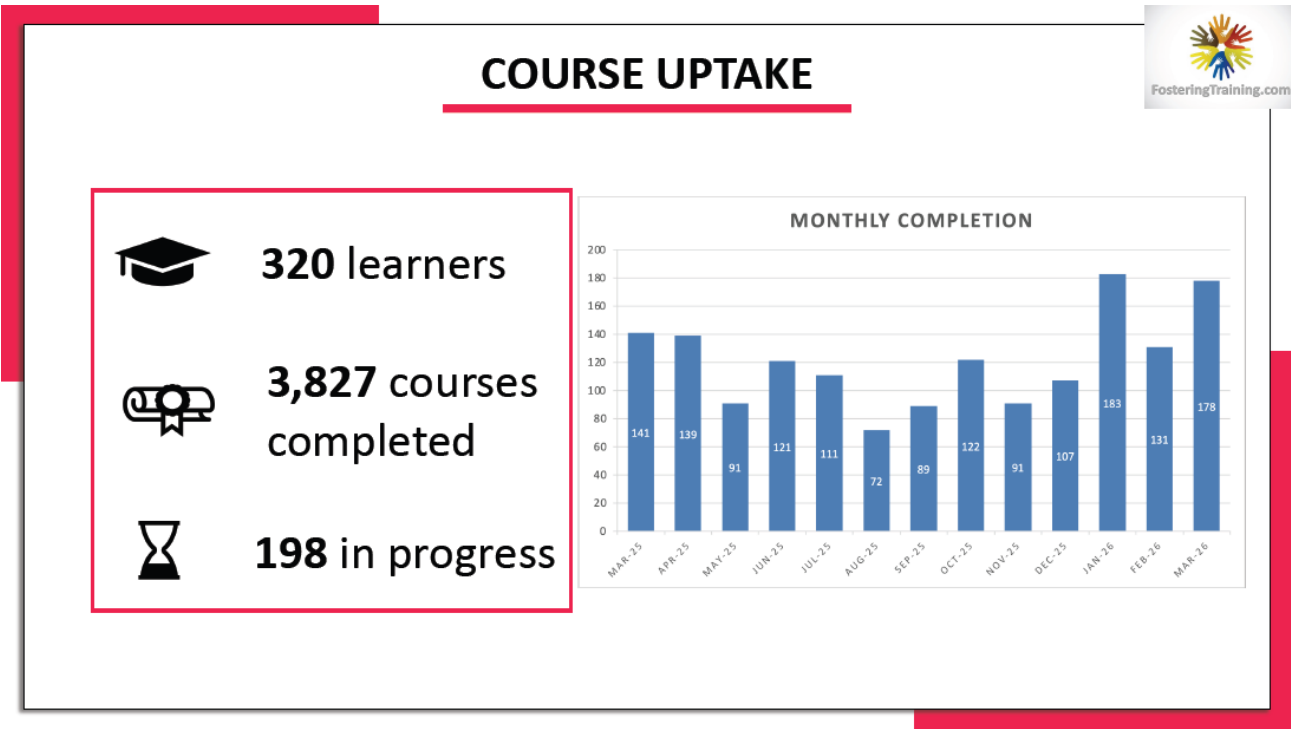
- Lack of accurate data and needs analysis to effectively recruit target needs of looked after children.
- Housing pressures mean less people have a spare room – particularly in London

- Cost of living crisis making it financially difficult for people to chose fostering as a career although the fees uplift has helped with this.
- Work commitments and lifestyle making it difficult for people to commit to a full time fostering role

TRAINING AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

63. Skills to Foster training is currently a two-day course in Croydon. The main post approval foster carer training is delivered via fosteringtraining.com via its suite of online courses. However, with the addition of a Senior Supervising Social Worker to coordinate training it is expected that more face to face and blended training will be scheduled for carers in 2026/27.
64. Take-up of training has been positive over the last year and applicants under assessment and Special Guardians have been given temporary (renewable) licenses for the training to help in their caring task.
65. The limited number of face-to-face courses currently run for foster carers covers.
- Allegations
 - Trauma
 - Gender Identity

Online Course Uptake



66. The table above illustrates the uptake and completion of courses by Croydon carers in 2025/26. There are 24 additional learners and 982 more courses completed which indicates successful efforts to embed professional development in fostering practice.

SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

67. Despite its obvious rewards, being a foster carer can be a very demanding vocation. Croydon's Fostering Service recognises this and understands good outcomes for children can only be achieved when foster carers feel valued, supported and equipped to provide the attention, commitment and care that children who may have experienced trauma in the form of neglect, abuse, exploitation and loss require.

68. Croydon's offer to foster carers encompasses the following support:

- Mentoring scheme for new carers up to 26 weeks.
- A range of Support Groups including, New Carer, Men in Fostering, Connected Carers, reflective spaces.
- Croydon Foster Carer Association membership
- Fostering specific clinical therapist
- Access to consultant Practitioners from young Croydon (Specialists in Child Exploitation)
- Access to Adolescent Worker
- Access to extensive training and professional development including practice library.
- Annual Foster Carer appreciation event
- Fostering hub support system (recruitment to two additional hubs is underway)
- Dedicated SSW and out-of-hour duty system

Finance

- Competitive fees
- Birthday allowance (dependent on child's age)
- Festival allowance (dependent on age)
- Holiday allowance for carer- £700 paid once annually.
- Holiday allowance for child – paid once annually at double the maintenance allowance
- Reimbursement of Council Tax (T&C's)
- Retention payment (T&C's)
- Fostering Champion Scheme – foster carers can be paid to help with recruitment events and activities (£12 ph.)

Benefits

- Discounted Parking and tickets at Fairfield Halls
- Paid membership to FosterTalk.
- Regular newsletters from the Service Manager.
- Transferring carer welcome payment of £1500 (T&C's)
- Refer a friend fee of £1200.
- Discounted leisure activities through Croydon GLL centres.

STAYING PUT

69. The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a duty on the local authority to provide 'staying put' arrangements for children in foster care to continue to live with their former foster carer beyond their 18th birthday and potentially up to the age of 21 years if they are in education. This is a welcome development for young people, many of whom are not ready to move into independent living and who want to remain as part of a family. The service was well-placed to implement these changes as we were already enabling young people to remain in their placements while they completed exams and were prepared fully for independence.

70. On 31st March 2026 there were 21 young people in staying put arrangements with Croydon Foster carers, which is an increase from the previous year.

71. The Staying Put guidance, and the Staying Put policy is in the process of being updated in collaboration with the Young People's 16+ service.

THE FOSTERING PANEL

72. Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (2011) require a Fostering Panel to be constituted, chaired by an independent person. Panel members include representatives from Children's Social Care and independent members with a range of experience. The panel makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches of children for long-term foster care and in certain circumstances reviewing the approval of foster carer. Final decisions, based on the panel's recommendations, are made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

A report detailing the activity of the Fostering Panel is included as Appendix 1.

REVIEW OF FOSTERING SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2024/2025

73. This section reviews the commitments to improvement within the service stated in the Annual Report 2024/25 and reflects on the progress made. The Service Priorities from previous years will continue into 2026/27 if they remain relevant.

Service Priorities 2024/25:

Priority	Ongoing	Achieved
Update the Foster Carer fee structure		X
Move towards a net positive fostering recruitment position in order to increase the number of Foster Carers in Croydon.	X	
Complete a No Detriment Policy (SGO Payment policy)	X	
Improve engagement in training of Special Guardians and Family and Friends carers		X
Recruit a dedicated lead for foster carer training		X
Producing a catalogue of face-to-face and hybrid training for Foster Carers	X	
Launch additional Fostering Hubs in Croydon		X
Support carers to improve completion of TSD	X	
Consider service innovations to improve sufficiency of Foster Homes	X	
Explore innovations including the use of AI to improve the supervision of Foster Carers.	X	
Embed the work of the adolescent worker to support stability for the child and carers.		X
Further embed collaborative work with other Social Work teams in order to increase participation of foster carers and care experienced young people in the design of the fostering service.	X	
Improve retention through improving benefits package available to foster carers as well and as a more responsive service		X
Increase carer specialisms in fostering (Emergency carers/ Parent & Child, Children with Disabilities)		X
Further develop the training and mentoring offer for foster carers	X	
Increase fostering capacity assessment using MySkills framework		X
Improve the capture and use of information in the service in order to improve carer utilisation and compliance with KPIs of Supervising Social Workers.	X	
Increase visibility of Fostering in Croydon through Croydon Fostering Week and the use of physical marketing media	X	
Increase numbers of matches presented at the fostering panel/ Fostering ADM	X	
Work with Fosterlink to improve Foster Carer Recruitment		X
Explore the creation of a regional recruitment hub with the DfE and South London partnership consortium members		X
Reduce risk of data breaches and improve information security in relation to papers sent fostering panel members.		X
Review Terms of References for Fostering and Private Fostering Panels	X	
Review and update fostering handbook and policies		X
Continue learning cycle resulting from audits and feedback.		X

Service Priorities 2026/27

74. Some of the priorities from 2025/26 will be carried over and in addition the council's transformation plans and vision of the team the Fostering Service has a number of additional priorities for the forthcoming year. These ambitious and aspirational priorities demonstrate the service's commitment to innovation, continuous improvement and alignment with emerging national fostering reforms.

Priority
Move towards a net positive fostering recruitment position in order to increase the number of Foster Carers in Croydon.
Complete a No Detriment Policy
Produce a catalogue of face-to-face and hybrid training for Foster Carers
Launch additional Fostering Hubs in Croydon
Support carers to improve completion of TSDs
Further explore innovations including the use of AI to improve the supervision and recruitment of Foster Carers.
Further embed collaborative work with other Social Work teams in order to increase participation of foster carers and care experienced young people in the design of the fostering service.
Further develop the training and mentoring offer for foster carers
Improve the capture and use of information in the service in order to improve carer utilisation and compliance with KPIs of Supervising Social Workers.
Increase visibility of Fostering in Croydon through Croydon Fostering Week and the use of digital and physical marketing media
Increase numbers of matches presented at the fostering panel/ Fostering ADM
Review Terms of References for the Fostering Panel
Increase number of experienced carers recruited from IFAs
Better representation of children's views in all areas of practice and operations
Improved child-centred language.
Streamline recruitment application process to improve the applicant experience
Implement fast-track assessment pathway for transferring carers
Implement revised foster carer medical framework
Launch parent and child foster provision
Launch Emergency foster carer provision
Reduce delays in approval of kinship carers
Reduce delays in completion of local authority safeguarding checks

COMPLAINTS

75. The Fostering Service reviews the complaints received about the service and uses these to inform service development.

76. In 2025/26 we received 13 complaints, nine were resolved at Stage 1 and four progressed to stage 2. This is comparable to last year where 12 complaints were received.

Version	Author	Name	Approved By	Name	Date	Review Date
1	Service Manager Fostering and Family Friends Care	Khalil Campbell	Director, Children's Social Care	Risthardh Hare	June 2026	June 2027

Appendix 1

ANNUAL REPORT FOR CROYDON

FOSTERING PANEL

April 2025 – March 2026

The annual report provides a summary of the work undertaken by Croydon Fostering Panel during the period April 2025–March 2026.

Introduction

As the Chair of Croydon Fostering Panel, I am asked to compile an annual report of Panel's activities. The report highlights that Panel has continued to be productive, consistent, and constructive.

The year has been positive with some significant changes. Tiffany Green took on the role of Panel Advisor in April 2025, and Austin Challen took over the role in December 2025. I believe Panel remains effective in supporting and contributing to raising standards. We strive to improve and to ensure that we continue to have independent oversight of the work placed before Panel.

On top of the changes to Panel Advisor, we have welcomed some new members to the central list and said goodbye to some valued colleagues. We have welcomed eight new members to Panel and appointed one existing Panel member as a second vice Chair. Both vice Chairs are now established and have Chaired Panels.

Working alongside our established members, those taking up new roles are developing experience in all areas of Panel practice. We are building a Panel that represents the local community and has representatives from a variety of backgrounds including care experienced young people, education, health, mental health, foster carers, youth work and social work. This has led to some challenging but positive discussions and has enabled good decisions to be made for children.

Panel coordinator Carole Westrip remains a consistent part of the service and invaluable in her role leading the Panel administration, delivering in a professional, calm and organised way and consistently receiving praise from Panel members and attendees.

I am proud of the work that Panel has completed in this period and continue to be impressed and appreciative of the work of all Panel Members, Panel Coordinator and the Panel Advisors over the past year.

Austin Challen and Carole Westrip have contributed to the information in this report.

Panel Meetings

The Croydon Fostering Panel meets on the first, third and fourth Tuesday of each month. Panels are either a full day of 5 cases or half a day of 3 cases. The agenda depends on the cases that are ready within the timescales for distributing the paperwork 5 working days before the meeting, and capacity of Panel. *[NMS 14.3]*

There were 31 Panel meetings held during this period, an increase from 27 for the previous year. This year 2 Panels were cancelled as not enough cases were ready to justify holding a Panel meeting, an improvement from 7 last year. All meetings were quorate *[reg 24(1)]*

Panel has welcomed several observers this year, including new employees of the Fostering Service, the ADM, Head of Specialist Services and other Children's Services. Social Workers completing the ASYE and Students Social Workers are routinely welcomed and encouraged to observe Panel as part of the induction/development.

Membership

Croydon Fostering Panel has been Chaired by Dylan McLees-Taylor since March 2020. Dylan is an experienced Fostering and Adoption Panel Chair. He was brought up in a family who fostered and has also fostered himself.

Panel is now supported by two vice Chairs: Shanie Jamieson, who has a background in Education, and Stacey Hunter who has a legal background.

We have had eight new Panel members join this year. The Central List members bring a wide variety of professional and personal expertise and experiences including, Care experienced, Health, Education, CAMHS, Foster Carer, Family Group Conference, Legal and Social Work.

Croydon reviews the all members of the Central List annually through the appraisal process. All but one appraisal of Panel members on the current Central List have been conducted from November 2025 through March 2026. The Panel Chair and Panel Advisor have worked collaboratively on this. *[NMS 14.1/14.8, Guidance 5.8]*

New Panel members observe at least one Panel as part of their induction, sign a Panel agreement, and receive a copy of Effective Fostering Panels (Coram/BAAF). The last edition was published in 2019, but we are purchasing copies of the new revised 2026 edition of Effective Panels. Panel members also receive a copy of the Croydon Fostering Handbook. [Guidance 5.14/NMS 23].

Panel is extremely well supported by Carole Westrip who is the Senior Panel Coordinator. Panel members, Social Workers, and families are highly appreciative of the work Carole completes prior, during and post Panel. Recruitment of new Panel members was mindful of considering applicants with knowledge of living and working in Croydon, or brought different skills and experience. This has helped improve how Panel reflects the demographics and diversity of the local community. The diversity of Panel was something that the Panel Advisor and Chair have previously acknowledged required improvement and we are pleased we are now moving in the right direction. However, this does not mean we do not have further way to go to ensure Panel fully reflects the local community whilst maintaining a Central List of members from diverse backgrounds.

Currently there is not a kinship carer member on the central list and Panel would benefit from having a kinship carer as a member, and whilst we have two Panel members with care experience we would welcome more.

Panel Training and Development

Links to recommended relevant articles/programmes/changes and updates and legislation are regularly sent to Panel members and discussed in AOB at meetings. During Panel members' appraisals we explored their wishes for future training and development.

Panel training was held on May 12th with nine Panel members attending. Presentations were given on the Horizons model of fostering which has been successfully adopted within the service; the role of the LADO and the process for managing allegations and concerns about foster carers; the My Skills assessment linked to a new reward scheme for all Croydon Foster Carers; and a session on the Recruitment of Foster Carers including experienced foster carers transferring from other agencies. During the training, a range of staff from within Croydon Fostering Service and other sections were introduced to Panel members. A session

on How Foster Carers are Supported to Understand and Manage Trauma had to be postponed and has been rescheduled as a longer session planned for 1st September.

The new Panel Advisor has delivered training around Panel processes and functions to over 50 members of staff within the department as part of Social Work Practice Week. Further workshops are planned over the coming months for individual teams and services.

It has been noted that fewer long-term matches of children with foster carers have been coming to Panel in recent months. Austin Challen is involved with managers across Croydon Children Young People & Education Department in reviewing and reviving the matching processes for both children under and over the age of 14, to ensure all children, including those in Independent Fostering Households have a permanence plan which is agreed or validated at Panel or by the ADM.

The Fostering Panel has operated a paperless system and since March 2020 a virtual Panel. All participants join meetings via Microsoft Teams. All Panel members were set up with Croydon email accounts in mid-2025 and now access all Panel papers via a secure SharePoint link. The uptake of this means of sharing documents has been across the board and Panel members report satisfaction with receiving papers. The changes were successfully implemented over a three-month period, with only a few cases where papers have had to be sent to individuals via Egress, or needed to join panel via personal email accounts. The Panel Coordinator has taken up any troubleshooting issues with IT.

Holding Panels virtually means that five cases can be presented rather than four when Panel is held face to face, and can lessen the anxiety for some participants, whilst others particularly those who struggle with technology would prefer face to face. This continues to be under review.

Panel members prepare their questions and analysis of paperwork prior to Panel and send to the Chair ahead of the meeting. The Chair collates all information and formulates the questions for applicants and Social Workers. These are shared with Panel Advisor and Coordinator and in some cases, presenting Social Workers are asked to answer selected questions or provide additional information before Panel for efficiency and to help reduce the necessity for deferrals.

To ensure the meeting runs smoothly and minimise it feeling overwhelming and intimidating, the Chair asks all the questions but is clear with those attending it is a collaborative process. Panel members are always asked at the end of the discussions with applicants/foster carers/Social Workers and their managers if they have anything further to add/ask to ensure all areas are fully covered.

Differences of opinion and a degree of debate are managed well, and the new Panel Advisor observes that each Panel member appears confident to assert their own views and opinions and raise these appropriately with the Chair and peers. It is noted that less experienced or less confident Panel members have at times also asserted differing views. The Chair has stated that he regards this as healthy and appropriate practice, while will maintaining reasonable limits on the time spent in arriving at a recommendation. Most recommendations are unanimous, but in several cases one or more Panel members have differed, and a majority recommendation is recorded.

Austin and Carole are working on implementing an online feedback system using Microsoft forms to enable Panel members and attendees to give feedback efficiently after Panel.

Fostering Panel Terms of Reference are being reviewed by Austin, Khalil and Dylan with a view to being updated to reflect changes in legislation and practice. Discussion of the DfE's proposed reforms "Renewing Fostering" are underway, and Panel members have been informed of consultations administered by Coram/BAAF. Further discussion in Panel and within the Department will continue as these developments progress.

The Coram/BAAF Form K assessment format has been successfully adopted since its introduction in March 2025 and is now established as the main working tool in this area. Panel have had input into its use and have now experienced many examples of completed reports being presented. Issues regarding the differences and similarities between mainstream foster carers and kinship foster carers are frequently discussed, and it is often emphasised that for Panel to approve applicants as kinship foster carers, it must be evidenced how they meet Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. An "NMS checklist" adapted from a Coram/BAAF format has been added to the Form K bundle in order to give clear guidance as to how the prospective carers meet the standards. This practice

will continue to be developed within the Family and Friends Assessment team. In rare cases, assessments have been submitted by Independent Assessors which need to be adapted or amended in order to demonstrate fully the differences between Special Guardianship and Kinship Fostering.

The Panel Chair and Panel Advisor have discussions after every Panel and whenever necessary in between. Relationships between the Panel Advisor, TMs and SSWs are strengthened by the Panel Advisor being fully part of the Fostering Management Team and feeding back regularly ongoing Panel issues. On occasion, an extra meeting will be held to discuss a particular case or development – for example the recent initiative within the Fostering Recruitment Team around assessing a greater number of experienced foster carers who are transferring from other Local Authorities or Independent Fostering Providers, some of whom are already fostering Croydon children. Panel members have also been appraised of some related adaptations to the assessment process and particularly short reports being presented to Panel.

A Fostering Panel Quality Assurance meeting is held two-monthly, Chaired by the Head of Specialist Services or Fostering Service Manager and attended by Panel Chair, ADM, Panel Advisor and Panel Coordinator. This is a forum to review the progress of cases through Panel and discuss any areas for development. This has successfully assured we are able to quickly identify what is working and any areas of concern where further development may be required.

ADM and Meetings

ADM Dawn West – Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance has been in post since January 2023. Minutes are approved and sent to Dawn within appropriate time scales after each Panel. ADM Decisions are being made within 7 days and are communicated to applicants promptly. [NMS 14.9]

The Panel Advisor and ADM meet fortnightly and discuss urgent cases in the interim. There has been effective communication between Dawn and Austin.

Head of Service and Service Manager

In September 2024 Leana Ebanks took over as the Fostering Head of Service complimenting Khalil Campbell who was appointed Fostering Service Manager in February 2024.

Practice continues to develop particularly around Kinship Foster Carers where Panel has seen a significant increase in approvals. Five Kinship Fostering households were approved in 2023/24, twenty four in 2024/2025 and thirty seven in 2025/26. This represents a 700% increase in three years.

This is a very significant increase, demonstrating not only a government initiative to promote more children living with extended family and friends, but also Croydon's commitment to children and their families and ensuring wherever possible children remain within their family networks.

Appraisals

All Panel members had their annual appraisal in 2025/26. The ADM completed the Panel Chair's appraisal. All Panel members have signed their new Panel Agreement – no Panel member can sit on Panel if they have not signed their agreement.

Panel Business

Croydon Fostering Panel considers; Applicants, Family and Friends Carers Assessments, Long Term Matches, Annual Reviews, Resignations, Terminations, Standard of Care, Change of Approval and Regulation 25 extension requests. Any significant changes in existing foster carers' circumstances should also be presented to Panel.

Austin, the Panel Advisor, alongside his colleagues in the Friends and Family Team have been pro-active in ensuring that kinship fostering assessments come to Panel within timescales as determined by Reg 24 and Reg 25 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations. Efforts are concentrated on preventing arrangements for children living with family members or friends becoming unregulated.

Any cases that do become unregulated are monitored closely by the service Manager, Family and Friends Team and Panel Advisor, with clear oversight from the ADM.

All first reviews of foster carers and subsequently reviews held every third year are presented to Panel. [Reg 28(2)] On occasion it is identified that a three-yearly review has been missed or excessively delayed and this is fed back to the Fostering Service, and Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers.

Key Statistics – Fostering Panel 2025/26

Number of Panels Held – 31 (2024/25 - 27 Panels held)

Panels Cancelled – 2 (2024/25 - 7 cancelled.)

No. of Cases presented – 132

Number of foster carers' reviews considered (all categories) – 58

Resignations – 6

Terminations of approval – 0 (two recommendations of termination are planned for forthcoming Panels)

Form F foster carer approvals – 8

Regulation 25 extension requests - 16

Comprehensive data showing the work of Panel 2025/26

Type of Case	April - May	June - July	Aug - Sept	Oct- Nov	Dec - Jan	Feb- Mar	Totals
Review Following Standards of Care	0	0	0	1 (+1 withdrawn)	2	1	5
Fostering Match	2	0	1	2	0	0	5
Resignation Notification	2	0	2	0	1	1	6
Reg.27 Kinship Approval	6 (+1 withdrawal, +1 negative)	7 (+1 deferred)	8	3 (+1 withdrawn)	3	4 (+2 deferred)	37
1st Annual Review of Carer	2	2	2	5	2	3	16
Three Yearly Annual Review	5 (+1 withdrawal)	5	5	8 (+1 deferred)	3	5	33
Return to Panel	0	1	1	0	1	2	5
Reg.25	2	2	2	2	3	4 (+1 negative)	16

Fostering Approval F	0	1	2	0	2	3	8
Total	22	19	23	24	17	27	132

Themes and Areas for Improvement

Themes emerging from this year's experience include:

- **Continued growth in approval of kinship foster carers and the importance of addressing the specific issues for this group of families.**
- **A recent increase in the number of planned assessments of experienced foster carers transferring to Croydon.**
- **Foster carers in all categories including experienced foster carers completing recordings, attending training, completing PDPs.**
- **Reports submitted with some elements missing, despite efforts to chase these.**
- **Some professionals not being timely in providing feedback in writing or in person.**

Panel reiterate to foster carers the importance of keeping comprehensive and insightful records and seeing this as part of a child's life story, as well as part of their safer caring practice. Records are often important in the event of an allegation.

It is strong theme that Panel have a Quality Assurance role and feedback on the above issues and many others is given to the Fostering Service and individual professionals after each Panel, and internal reporting by the Panel Advisor.

It is acknowledged that many applicants see themselves primarily as aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings or friends of the family, and secondarily as approved foster carers. However, Panel consistently questions assessments where these challenges are not addressed and is very able to give negative recommendations in each type of case. Assessing Social Workers, supervising Social Workers and children's Social Workers working collaboratively with families are essential to addressing these issues.

Issues around completion of regular logs, participation in training, and attendance of support groups are more pronounced with the Kinship fostering families. Kinship foster carers are

more likely to live at some distance from the borough, including overseas, raising new challenges about how to support families.

It has been a journey for Panel to recognise that there may be some differences between mainstream and kinship fostering regarding the interpretation and implementation of some Regulations and Standards. Standards such as a child having their own bedroom may not always be reached within a kinship arrangement, but there is always consideration of other private spaces within the family home. There are frequent discussions of DBS outcomes and risk assessments and where to set the bar in each individual case.

Recently it has been suggested that some Kinship foster carers exhibit high levels of skills and compassion, and might in time consider becoming mainstream foster carers. Recent instances include: a couple who have successfully cared for a family member up to and beyond 18, now feel they have gained from the experience and have the capacity to extend their offer to other children; a case where two families who are neighbours are caring for an unrelated young person with multiple needs and have exhibited insight and experience.

Paperwork being received late remains an ongoing challenge in some cases, with the Panel Coordinator and Panel Advisor often having to chase paperwork and sometimes re-arrange Panel dates.

There have been some changes in the staffing of the Fostering Service, which now has six teams and over sixty permanent staff, in addition to sessional workers and independent assessors. There is a low rate of usage of locum staff. This is presently at zero.

We have seen a reduction in the number of matching cases coming to Panel and this is an issue that is a priority going forward, and we hope to see this increase in the coming year.

Communication with the Fostering Service

The Panel Advisor attends regular meetings regular scheduled meetings with the Fostering Service Management Team, Panel Chair and ADM, and impromptu meetings with assessing Social Workers, supervising Social Workers, children's Social Workers and their managers as and when needed. Significant issues raised within Panel are communicated to the Fostering Service Manager as they are identified, and arrangements made to discuss these.

The Panel Advisor and Panel Coordinator, in conjunction with the teams within the Fostering Service, continue to encourage children's Social Workers and/or their managers to attend Panel. Progress in this area varies and there is still room for improvement. Non-attendance is fed back through management.

User feedback

Attendees at Panel are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience of Panel. The plan is to further enhance this with the use of new online post-Panel feedback forms.

The new Panel Advisor observes that foster carers feel comfortable attending Panel, speak confidently and are always heard. Overall, foster carers take Panel seriously and see it as an important place to describe their experiences or sometimes to express frustrations. Considerable efforts are made to ensure foster carers feel comfortable and supported and never feel intimidated. It is noted that where Social Workers are able to be present with foster carers in their homes it increases foster carers' participation and confidence.

Conclusions and recommendations

Guidance 5.2 states that; Fostering Panels are intended as multi-disciplinary bodies with independence from the fostering service. Panels therefore play an important quality assurance role, providing objectivity and having the ability to challenge practice. Panels are required to give regular feedback to the fostering service.

Croydon fostering Panel has striven to drive up the standard of reports presented and to offer support and guidance where appropriate. The Panel Advisor has worked hard to ensure that gatekeeping and chasing of reports continues to ensure cases are compliant and suitable for Panel.

With the Regulation 24 temporary fostering arrangements being monitored, kinship assessments being closely checked and workers being offered support and advice to make changes and to develop positive habits by ensuring they come to Panel within timescales, the number of unregulated placements continues to decrease.

The quality of Foster Carer reviews is mostly high and while there are some instances where the National Minimum Standards have not been met, this is an improving picture.

Inclusion of completed Health and Safety Assessments, Family Safer Caring Policies and Professional Development Plans are now routinely completed which is a positive improvement from previous years. A new skills-based reward system and fees structure, informed by the new “My Skills” Assessment are being rolled out and Panel are starting to see these included within assessment and annual review bundles. Panel have received input from the Fostering service to explain this process. There are still some cases where there is a lack of feedback from children living with foster carers, birth children of foster carers, children’s Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, or even from foster carers themselves. If these are not included in time to be sent out to Panel, they are provided shortly before Panel or verbal feedback is given at Panel. Panel is very keen to see the Voice of the Child represented throughout documentation. It is well understood that many children will not prioritise filling in a form or may not want to speak to a Social Worker on a given day, but often suggests creative ways to engage with children and young people.

The language used in reports is often commented on and it is felt that there is some way to go in the consistent use of child-centred or care-based language, with terms like placement, respite, LAC, contact being used. Various creative alternatives are suggested, depending on context, such as:

- ***For “placement” - home, household, room, child.***
- ***For “respite” - short stays, sleepovers, going to stay with Nan.***
- ***For “LAC/CLA” - child, young person, child’s name.***
- ***For “Contact” - family time, seeing my Mum.***

Croydon Panel members are committed to their role and the part they play in ensuring the children and young people of Croydon are cared for safely and enjoy a positive experience of family life that offers opportunities to thrive and develop with the support and care they deserve.

Panel would like to thank the dedicated prospective and approved foster carers who make this possible and the teams that support them to be able to carry out this vital and important role.

Glossary:

- “NMS” – Fostering services: national minimum standards 2011

- “Fostering Regulations” - Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended) 2011
- “Care Planning Regs”/Reg 24/Reg 25 - The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

Dylan McLees-Taylor

Croydon Panel Chair

28.05.2026