



TAMESIDE FOSTERING SERVICE

3 Year Recruitment Strategy

FY21-FY24

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Introduction

This document outlines the 3-year Tameside Council plan to recruit foster carers from FY21-24. Tameside Council Fostering Service is responsible for recruiting, assessing and supporting new foster carers through training and development and beyond. The service aims to provide suitable, secure placements for some of the most vulnerable children in the borough. It is therefore imperative that suitable foster carers are recruited from a range of diverse backgrounds with emphasis placed on the quality of care and stability of placements to ensure the best possible outcomes for local children and young people.

The single aim is to ensure the maximum number of cared for children in the borough are provided with safe, loving and secure placements and somewhere they feel at home. The strategy is underpinned by values outlined in the Tameside & Glossop Corporate Plan, with particular emphasis on the 4 pillars forming the 'Starting Well' values; 'The Very Best Start in Life', 'Aspiration and Hope through Learning' 'Resilient Families and Supportive Networks' and 'Opportunities for People to Fulfil Their Potential'. Aligning the Tameside Council vision and wider corporate values will be prioritised with the aforementioned aim of improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children in the borough, which remains of utmost importance. Foster Carers are central to this vision, providing safe homes and stability at the most unsettling times in children's lives. It is by retaining and building a strong network of supported Foster Carers that enable us to ensure we can provide the best outcomes for the children and young people in care.

As the needs of Tameside's Cared for Children vary, so must the provisions of the placements on offer, which means that the service should ensure to recruit a wide ranging pool of carers, some of who are willing to take on older children, short-term placements, long-term, sibling groups, respite care and mother-and-baby placements. While being mindful that the children and young people in the care of the local authority are not statistics, it is important to consider the number of children, age ranges, types of placements and demographics in the data provided in order to highlight the task to be achieved.

This document should be read alongside the Fostering Marketing & Communications Plan, which maps the Recruitment Strategy for the remainder of FY20/21, and also for FY21/22 where all marketing activities are concerned. The Marketing & Communications plan will be updated annually in line with latest events and occurrences in addition to national and localised campaigns.

'The Tameside Mission'

This strategy is designed to maximise the number of in-house foster carers in the Tameside borough while supporting & retaining existing carers. It is split into two parts accordingly; the first will focus on the recruitment of new carers and the second will propose the retention strategy. The importance of retention in the overall plan is paramount as this considers the long-term goal of building upon an existing pool of foster carers while minimising attrition. This will ensure our existing carers are happy within their roles and feel fully supported, while attracting new carers based on what we can offer as a service and through word-of-mouth recommendation that should not be underestimated.

Recruitment Strategy: Aims & Objectives

Through a variety of marketing, recruitment & retention techniques, we aim to support and grow our network of valued carers in Tameside. The number of cared for children in Tameside has been

on an upward trajectory for some time, so the need for high quality in-house foster carers is as great as ever before. This approach includes the retention of existing foster carers, through implementation of the improvements to the foster carer offer, in addition to working closely with carers to listen to their views and consider them when building and implementing the strategy.

Tactical objectives;

- To increase in-house placement sufficiency in Tameside by 34%* over the next three years
- To retain existing foster carers and through support and training, enable them to take on more challenging placements;
- To implement the Marketing Plan for FY21/22 which has the primary aim of delivering the first steps towards the 34% increase target for foster carers **(plan to be updated each FY in line with optimisation approach)**;

Strategic objectives;

- To support & retain existing foster carers through training & incentives and ensure they feel valued in their roles;
- To build a strong fostering identity that is recognisable and resonates with our carers and young people;
- To ensure all comms are consistent & aligned to enable strength in campaign messaging
- To raise awareness & consideration for fostering in Tameside (long term).

Sufficiency Projection: Needs Analysis

By nature, the projection for placement sufficiency of in-house foster carers is challenging with many constant variables making it difficult to predict accurate provisions for a given time, with fluctuation in placement supply and demand.

However, projections will be made based on data from the previous 3 years, with projections being reviewed throughout the year in line with the changing nature of the demand.

A report by Fostering Futures in conjunction with The Fostering Network¹ suggests that 85% internal foster placement availability produces the optimum benefits from a mixed economy of provision.

Taking into account the previous year figures for Cared for Children in Tameside 2019/20², out of the total 216 children in mainstream foster care in Tameside, 110 are placed within mainstream recruited foster care placements, while 106 within private external fostering placements. This gives a percentage split of:

- 51% of placements provided by Local Authority
- 49% of placements provided by IFAs

*Based on today's foster carer figures – this is dynamic and under constant review.

¹ Source: Fostering Futures: Impower in consultation with the Fostering Network on behalf of DfE 2013

² Source: Tameside Performance and Intelligence Service data. Provided for the report, November 2020

According to GM statistics, ‘Three-quarters of all foster placements are run by Local Authority Fostering Services’³, highlighting a 24% discrepancy of Tameside Council provided fostering placements compared to the regional figures.

Table 1 shows the Foster Care placements for Tameside within the past three years, and whether these placements were made within the local authority (recruited foster care placements) or an IFA, where an in-house placement was not available;

Foster Care Placements in Tameside

Year placement Made	In-house placements	IFA placements	Total Foster Care Placements
2017/18	125 (51%)	120 (49%)	245
2018/19	131 (50%)	132 (50%)	262
2019/20	110 (51%)	106 (49%)	216

Taking into account the 85% benchmark for optimum internal foster carer provision, the average percentage of Local Authority provided placements of 51% over the past three years highlight the task to be done over the coming years to increase Tameside’s in-house mainstream foster carer provision by around 34%. This will be explored in further detail below. As aforementioned, this figure is based on similar numbers of children coming into care as in previous years on average.

The below table 2 shows the ages of children in foster care in Tameside over the last three years, and the number of children who were placed either with an IFA or in a recruited LA foster placement. The final columns show the percentage of children the LA were able to place in-house. Please note this is at a child level rather than at placement level as in the above table.

Tameside Foster Care Placements by Age

Age of child	Number of children placed with an IFA	Number of children placed with LA placement	LA provided placement provision %
2017/18			
<1	0	0	n/a
1-4 years	9	28	75%
5-9 years	22	35	61%
10-15 years	44	34	44%
16+ years	32	18	36%
Total	107	115	52%
2018/19			
<1	7	20	74%
1-4 years	25	33	57%

³ GM Fostering – Recruitment and Assessment Hub, Statement of Intent, DCS Group – Friday 13th November 2020

5-9 years	34	24	64%
10-15 years	42	42	60%
16+ years	3	4	57%
Total	111	123	53%
2019/20			
<1	9	27	75%
1-4 years	10	22	68%
5-9 years	32	25	43%
10-15 years	39	25	39%
16+ years	3	2	40%
Total	93	101	52%

The data demonstrates the requirements for foster carer capacity for every age group, with the need becoming greater with the increasing age of the child.

There is a particular need to recruit foster carers for children ages 10+ but as you can see from the data over the three years, the number of foster carer placements for 5-9 year olds provided by the local authority in 2018/19 dropped significantly to 43% of children for that age group. If we are to predict a similar pattern for coming years, with a larger number of younger children coming into foster care, as we are already aware there needs to be significant increase in foster carers for all age groups, with a particular focus on over 5s.

In addition, the task of matching becomes ever more challenging without the provision of suitable carers, as outlined in a recent Ofsted report;

The serious shortage of carers is one of the most significant challenges in making successful matches for children. This shortage is particularly acute when seeking matches for groups of brothers and sisters, disabled children and teenagers.⁴

Not only does poor matching mean placement breakdowns and further unsettlement for children, but it can also lead to disengaged foster carers who may subsequently deregister as a result, as they can feel disillusioned with the local authority. While good matching and having the means to do so successfully relies on the recruitment of a diverse foster carer cohort, we must also consider flexibility in approach from existing carers to help meet the needs of children and how we can support this, e.g. through specialist training.

This is also key when considering age groups, a flexible approach is required from foster carers with the understanding (that may seem an obvious concept) that while in placement (or indeed not) the child is getting older all the time. If we then approve carers for a younger age group and the child in placement ages out of this, unsettlement is caused due to inflexibilities in the system and the rigid view that carers should only be approved for a certain age group. There is also the issue of children at certain ages presenting at younger ages, who require care at a similar level to those much younger.

⁴ *Matching in foster care, Making good decisions for children in care and care leavers*, Ofsted, November 2020

We also need to stretch the capabilities of existing carers through offering training and support to take on children with additional needs or different ages to the children they have experience caring for. Encouraging carers to gain new skills and experiences will offer our children and young people more options, and the better chance of an in-house placement.

We therefore aim to recruit flexible carers, who are open to the varying needs of children irrespective of age, and appeal to carers who have the capacity to take on sibling groups. While prospective carers will have an age group in mind, we will work with them to understand their skills and strengths, but also educate that many children requiring care could be well matched to them despite them being slightly older/younger.

Children placed with an IFA

For those children placed with an IFA, the demographic information of the children has been broken down below to help identify key trends and recognise the foster carers we need to recruit, for the children we have in the past, been unable to place within the Local Authority;

Gender comparison

Table 3 shows a three year comparison of IFA placements, with the boy/girl split as follows;

	Boys' IFA placements	Girls' IFA placements
2017/18	51	69
2018/19	69	63
2019/20	54	52

Which, besides a slightly higher proportion of girls' IFA placements made in 2018/18 than boys', there is no particular pattern to suggest that the IFA placements skew one particular way or the other over time that would need to be considered. Consequently, carers are required to match a relatively even demand for boys and girls placements.

Ethnicity comparison

The three year data comparison shows that overall, there are fewer children from minority ethnic backgrounds being placed with an IFA since 2017, with 72 placements in 2017/18, 60 in 2018/19 and 34 made in 2019/20. This reflects the overarching pattern of smaller numbers of children from a minority ethnic background coming into foster care year on year when considering total placements.

When looking at residential placements however, the data shows growing numbers of children from minority backgrounds year-on-year (inclusive of children not from a White British background) being placed in a residential setting;

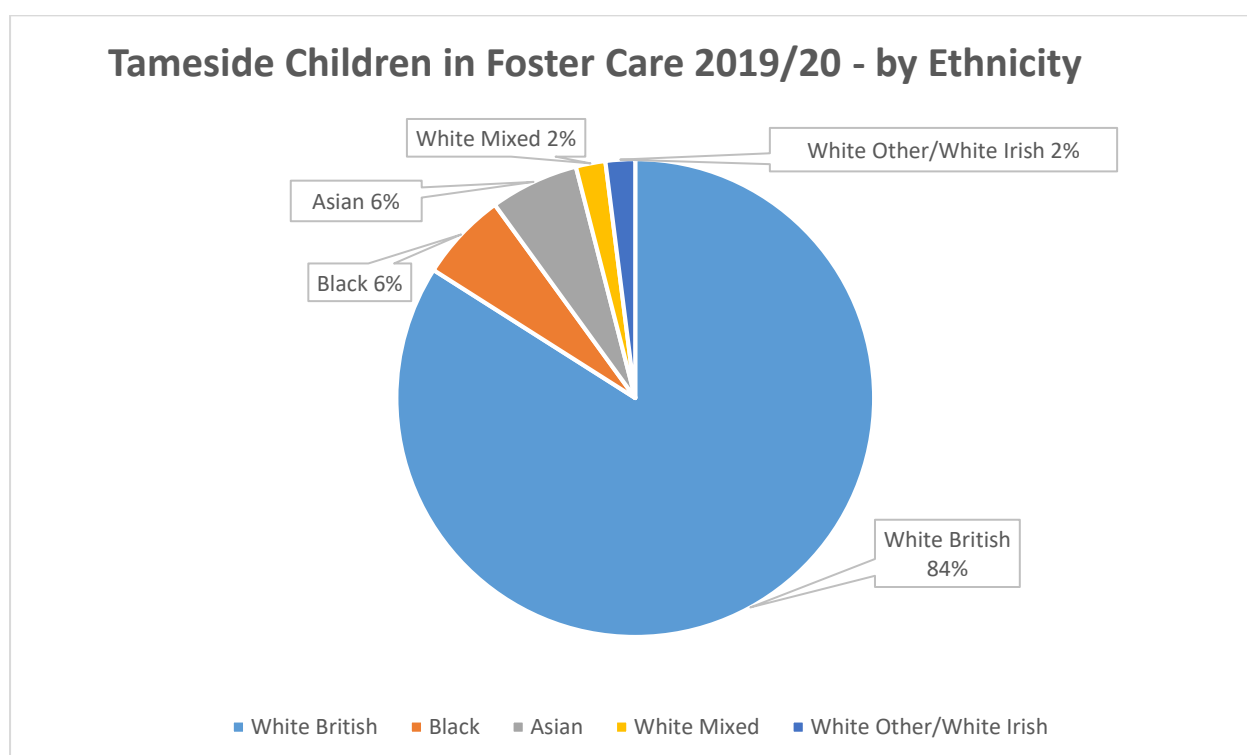
- 2017/18: 15%
- 2018/19: 19%
- 2019/20: 20%

Although it is unknown whether these children were considered for a foster care placement, it is likely these children were placed in a residential setting due to no suitable foster care placement being available.

It is clear that the increasing proportion of placements for ethnic minority children require a larger provision of minority background foster carers to allow options for these children in suitable placements to meet their cultural needs, should foster care be considered.

In addition, with 16% of children in foster care in 2019/20 coming from a minority background, compared to 4.4% of approved foster carers, we need more than ever to appeal to a diverse range of carers, especially those from minority and BAME backgrounds, to align with the children in our care.

The graph below shows the overall break down by ethnicity of children coming in to foster care in Tameside in 2019/20;



While the proportion of children coming in to foster care for the year 2019/20 in Tameside is predominantly White British (84%) it is crucial that we also consider our minority children who make up a significant 16% of our children in foster care population. Looking further into the data we can see the ethnicity break down of children placed in either an IFA or with the Local Authority for 2019/20;

Children from an Asian Ethnic background – 6 out of 11 (55%) placed with an IFA. The Asian children placed with an IFA were a range of ages between 4-14 years of age. 4 were girls, 2 were boys.

Children from a Black Ethnic background – 3 out of 10 (33%) black children were placed with an IFA. They were aged between 5-8 years old, and all were boys.

Children from a White Mixed background – 1 out of 4 (25%) of children was placed with an IFA. The child was an 8-year-old boy.

Children from a White (other) or White Irish background – 1 out of 4 children (25%) was placed with an IFA. The child was a 14 year-old boy.

At the time of writing in November 2020, the current number of Tameside Council mainstream foster carers is 107, looking after 161 children in mainstream foster care. As aforementioned, only 4.4% of the mainstream foster carer cohort are from a minority ethnic background, meaning we must aim to appeal to minority carers more than ever, to aim to increase by approximately 12% over the next three years to match the needs of children coming into foster care, and even greater when considering children in residential placements too. This projection is based on similar patterns of children coming into care in the coming years. Naturally, the numbers of minority children coming into foster care will fluctuate over time, but by appealing to carers from diverse backgrounds, it means that we will be better equipped to meet the needs of foster children should the data trends continue in the way we are currently seeing.

Ultimately, the data analysis tells us that it is important more than ever to appeal to a wider demographic of potential carers, while not alienating our existing foster carer demographic.

How we will do this is also explored in more detail in the below section 'Diversity, Inclusion and Recruiting Minority Ethnic and BAME carers' further in the document.

Sibling groups

Looking closely at the sibling group data from the previous year 2019/20, for all placements that commenced between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 there were 117 children making up a total of 47 sibling groups that came into care. All 47 of the sibling groups were assessed and planned to remain together. However, there were 5 sibling groups that could not remain together due to lack of available foster care placements despite their plan being to keep them together.

We therefore need to appeal to foster carers who have the ability to take on sibling groups, including larger groups of children. Again, we can look at a child-specific recruitment campaign to find the right carers but the greatest efforts must be made to ensure anonymity when creating profiles of children.

SEND Children

The three-year data comparison shows the growing numbers of children with a registered disability in addition to those with an EHCP coming into foster care;

Year	Children with a disability	Children with an EHCP
2017/18	9	31
2018/19	8	27
2019/20	9	24

While the figures show slightly fewer children in foster care with an EHCP since 2017/18, the figures show that a child is more likely to be placed with an IFA if they have a disability or EHCP, and this was the case for each year in the comparison period.

To reduce reliance on IFAs and provide options for disabled and SEND children, it is important that we appeal for carers who have experience looking after children with additional needs. We also should appeal to existing foster carers who may be interested in further support and training to care for disabled and SEND children. A recent survey we ran with existing foster carers on training and

support highlighted that more could be done for training on disabilities so this is something currently being considered for the training programme.

Residential Placements

It is difficult to determine from existing data exactly how many children were considered for foster care who were later placed residentially due to lack of foster placement availability. According to the Greater Manchester Children's Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2022, there has been a 14% increase in the use of independent residential care homes since December 2018.⁵ When considering this at a Tameside Level, the three year data comparison shows that there has been a 22% increase in independent residential home placements between 2017/18 and 2019/20. The overall figures for residential placements (inclusive of LA and IFA placements) show an increase of 18% over the three year period, highlighting further Tameside's disproportionate reliance on children's homes that urgently needs to be rebalanced.

Even though we are unable to obtain whether the children in residential placements were considered for foster care placements, it is reasonable to assume that the lack of available foster care placements available undoubtedly driven this increase. The ages of children in residential setting also show concerning upward trends, even in the under 13 age bracket:

- 7 placements in 2017/18
- 9 placements in 2018/19
- 24 placements in 2019/20

Looking further at the specific children placed within residential settings, within 2019/20 we can see that:

- 20% of children overall were under 13 years old
- 61% of children were boys
- 10% of children placed had a disability
- 41% were subject to an Education and Health Care Plan
- 16% were from a BAME background
- 5% of children overall were both subject to an Educational Healthcare Plan and were from a BAME background.

With the provision of suitable foster care placements, particularly appealing to carers who can look after children with special educational needs and disabilities, we can look to reverse this pattern. It is also evident that more emphasis should be placed on the recruitment of BAME carers to match the needs of the minority ethnic children coming into care. Ultimately, we need foster carers with existing skills in caring for children and adults with disabilities and additional needs, but also those who are willing to specialise in key areas such as disabilities, including our existing foster carers.

As many SEND children in care have very specific needs, one way we will look to recruit specialist foster carers is through child-specific recruitment campaigns. This will be explored in more detail further in the document.

⁵ Greater Manchester Children's Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2022, GMCA

Foster Carer Recruitment Targets

In order to reach the 85% benchmark for optimum internal foster carer provision, the current split of 110 in house placements and 106 IFA placements needs to be realigned by around 34% in favour of in house provision. This equates to in house provision for around 184 placements, based on us seeing similar trends of children coming into foster care.

It's important that we also ensure retention of existing foster carers, however it's inevitable that there will be some level of deregistrations of existing foster carers through retirement and SGO. As mentioned, it's anticipated as part of sufficiency planning that over next three financial years, there needs to increase in the region of 70-80 new carers. The targets for the next three years are broken down as follows;

FY20/21: 7-10 new carers

Rationale: We aim to match the number of previous year recruitment of carers by the end of this FY. This is due to many changes and movements within the service that until now, has not allowed for a clear recruitment strategy to be in place. The maintaining of previous year figures will allow the service to create clear and strong objectives for the coming years while the groundwork is done to create successful recruitment and retention processes.

FY21/22: 12-15 new carers

Rationale: The steady increase in target carer numbers reflects the start of the implementation of the Fostering Recruitment Strategy and Foster Carer offer. This year will allow us to put the plans in motion, while building a stronger network of support and incentives for our existing foster carers. This will truly be a year of trial, test and evaluation of many different marketing techniques to find the best ways to reach potential carers in Tameside.

We hope that the implementation of a clear offer and of the aims and objectives of the new strategy that existing carers will be receptive, and in turn aid the growth of our fostering network through word-of-mouth recommendation and involvement in key campaigns throughout the year.

FY22/23: 24-28 new carers

This year will be the one in which our established marketing strategy enables us to 'ramp up' our recruitment position strengthened by the evaluation of key campaigns from the previous year. With a strategy tried and tested, and established foster carer offer meaning strength in our fostering community, we will aim to double the foster carer recruitment figures from the previous year.

FY23/24: 14-20 new carers

Rationale: We predict in the following year a natural slowing of the recruitment of carers due to the conversion of a large number of potential applicants in the previous year. However, this give us the opportunity to increase our efforts in reaching more of our minority carers e.g. younger carers, career carers and find innovative ways to appeal to an even wider audience with precision targeting and streamlined approaches to marketing.

Foster Carer Recruitment: COVID-19 impact

Enquiries

The below table shows a comparison of enquiry figures from 2019/20 and the same time in 2020/21;

<u>Month</u>	<u>2019/20</u>	<u>2020/21</u>
August	8	28
September	15	13
October	14	14
November	7	10
December	4	9

The figures show that except September, there was year-on-year growth in enquiries for each month. The December figures show that we managed to double December 2019's total, this could be attributed to the November radio campaign and continuous presence on social media. The slight drop in September enquiries YoY could be explained by a spike in August enquiries (due to marketing campaign) that meant people who may have enquired in September were encouraged to enquire sooner due to being targeted with campaign messaging and call to action of 'Enquire Now'. The August campaign consisted of a £5,000 marketing spend that was concentrated on Facebook Lead Generation, Online Display and Google Search Ad digital channels. As the Facebook and Google channels were seen to be most effective on evaluation, these will form a part of the Marketing & Recruitment Strategy moving forwards. The overall increase in August's figures highlight the importance of digital marketing and how it helps to produce a steady flow of enquiries month-to-month.

While the usual face-to-face recruitment events were not able to take place, the digital approach enabled us to keep grow our enquiries YoY. While the Facebook and Google channels were successful as aforementioned, we ran a digital recruitment event via Zoom in September and used social media as a tool to raise awareness, but unfortunately this was attended by one applicant only. The feedback from other local authorities is very mixed, with others also stating they find they have similar numbers, and attendees are usually those who have enquired and are further along in the process but want to find out more. It should therefore be considered that while Zoom events are a useful education and awareness tool, they do have limitations for producing initial enquiries.

From those who enquired, the below table shows the applicants who went through to assessment and approval;

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Approvals</u>
August – December 2019	5
August - December 2020	2 7 awaiting assessment

For those awaiting assessment, there have been a variety of reasons both COVID and non-COVID related;

- 3 - we are awaiting application forms back
- 2 – additional information is needed for panel
- 1 – spare room is temporarily in use

- 1 – applicant is currently not engaging

Targeting Potential Foster Carers

The 2013 report by The Fostering Network ‘Why Foster Carers Care’ outlines the three Values Modes which are based on the psychological theory of motivation developed by Abraham Maslow and summarised in his Hierarchy of Needs. Within Maslow’s hierarchy, three primary motivational levels are recognised – the Settler (Sustenance Driven), the Prospector (Outer Directed) and the Pioneer (Inner Directed).⁶

The significant majority of foster carers are Pioneers – 73 per cent against a national adult population average of 42 per cent, representing one of the most significant concentrations found in the history of Values Modes research.⁷

The Pioneer set of values aligns with the majority of Tameside’s foster carers, outlined below;

- Trying to put things together and understand the big picture.
- Concerned about the environment, society, world poverty, and so on
- Always looking for new questions and answers
- Strong internal sense of what is right and what is wrong.
- Strong desire for fairness, justice and equality.
- Self-assured and sense of self-agency
- Generally positive about change, if it seems worthwhile.
- Cautiously optimistic about the future.

Importantly, ‘Pioneers also have a need to feel part of and contribute to the wider service’, demonstrating the value of our carers in the process of recruitment and how we can utilise their skills and objectives to find like-minded individuals.

Key messaging to resonate with our Pioneer audience could include;

- The rewards in looking after children e.g. helping them to achieve goals, reach their potential
- The challenge and hard work that comes with being a foster carer
- The reassurance from the rewards that they foster to make a difference, and it is a worthwhile role
- The lack of stability and unsettlement in children’s lives that causes them to act, inspired by a sense of responsibility of wanting to help the situation
- The moral standing of fostering with a local authority over an independent fostering agency
- Hearing stories from real foster carers to inspire them

By building and maintaining a strong foster care community, we will create one of our most valuable tools for retention and recruitment.

Of the remaining 27 per cent of foster carers who are not Pioneers, 22 per cent are Prospectors and just five per cent are Settlers. Prospectors are characterised by the following attributes;

- Success oriented. Always want to ‘be the best’ at what they are doing.

⁶ Why foster carers care The Fostering Network

⁷ Ibid.

- Welcome opportunities to show their abilities.
- Take great pleasure in recognition and reward.
- Look to maximise opportunities.
- Will take opportunities for advancement and professional networking.
- Trend and fashion conscious. Like new ideas and new ways.
- Generally optimistic about the future

Key messaging to appeal to Prospectors should include;

- The idea of fostering caring as a career/profession that is skilled and rewarding
- The stories of 'career' carers who are highly skilled and are experienced at caring for children with different needs
- As they would be concerned with allowances, messaging around the competitiveness of allowances should be included, although we want to avoid putting a 'salary' as such.

Targeting focus should therefore be largely focussed on the Pioneer group, with some consideration also to Prospectors, who we consider more as 'career' foster carers.

Mosaic Profiling

Targeting led by a value-based approach will be strengthened by the use of Mosaic profiling, to precisely target those in Tameside who are most likely to foster, based on the demographic profiling of current foster carers in Tameside. Mosaic works by collecting data from individuals and households from many different sources, and using statistical techniques, create groups of people who are likely to share similar demographics, lifestyles and behaviours. Groupings are then allocated to individuals and households by postcode to indicate their likely group and type.

A recent analysis of Tameside's foster carer cohort places existing foster carers within the following primary Mosaic profiles;

1. Family Basics

Family Basics are families with children who have limited budgets and can struggle to make ends meet. Their homes are low cost and are often found in areas with fewer employment options.

2. Modest Traditions

Modest Traditions are older people living in inexpensive homes that they own, often with the mortgage nearly paid off. Both incomes and qualifications are modest, but most enjoy a reasonable standard of living. They are long-settled residents having lived in their neighbourhoods for many years.

3. Aspiring Homemakers

Aspiring Homemakers are younger households who have, often, only recently set up home. They usually own their homes in private suburbs, which they have chosen to fit their budget.

4. Senior Security

Senior Security are elderly singles and couples who are still living independently in comfortable homes that they own. Property equity gives them a reassuring level of financial security. This group includes people who have remained in family homes after their children have left, and those who have chosen to downsize to live among others of similar ages and lifestyles.

5. Municipal Challenge

overarching approach will subtle e.g. 'Don't rule yourself out' which remains more inclusive than to simply state 'We need more BAME foster carers'.

2. Targeting

Working alongside our digital partner LocalIQ, we will build Mosaic profiles of existing BAME foster carers to allow us to reach those of a similar profile. By understanding the ages, locations and interests of existing carers from ethnic backgrounds, we will be better equipped to reach those who may be likely to consider fostering. If we find trends in particular locations, we can then upweight our media spend in these areas with visuals that resonate best with the target audiences.

3. Community Engagement

We will work with schools, churches, mosques and other places of worship to promote foster care, whether this is by having presence in internal comms, on social media pages or at virtual events. We will work to have a presence and bring along foster carers to talk to members, and distribute relevant marketing materials to engage potential BAME foster carers.

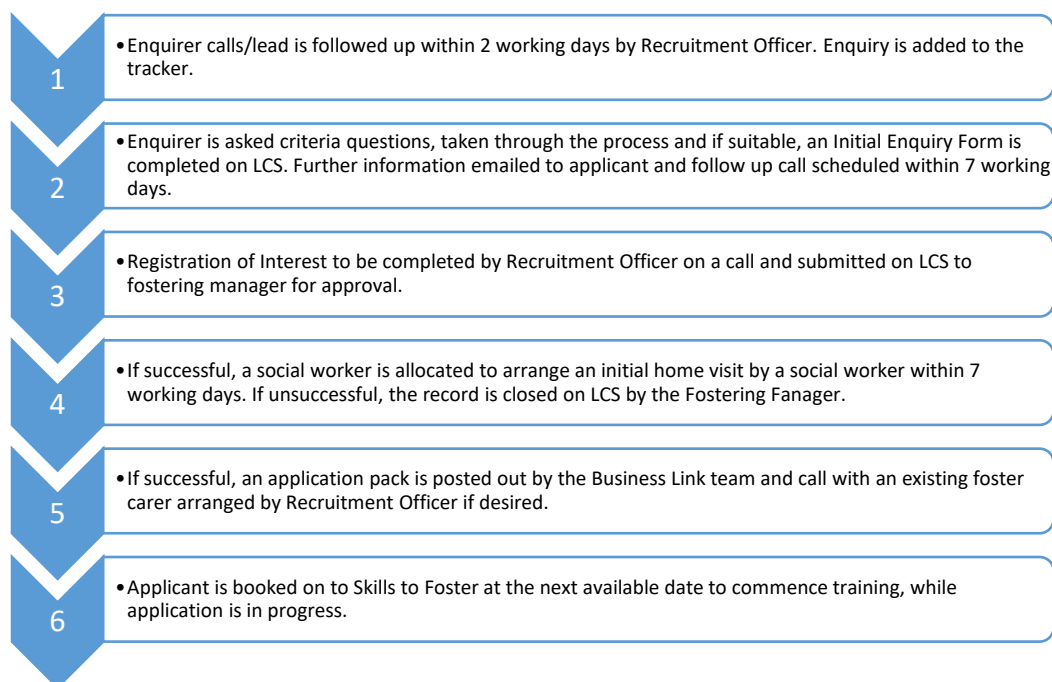
4. Campaigns

Tying in to national events such as Black History Month will enable us to promote foster care for our BAME children at a time when there is a great focus on diversity. This can be done by sharing relevant posts and directing to events through our social media pages. However, we need to avoid being tokenistic in approach so while we will celebrate ethnic cultures at key times of the year, the main focus is to be consistently inclusive in our approach to marketing to BAME carers all year round.

Recruitment Approach

1. Enquiry process

The approach should firstly address the enquiry process, the first experience of Tameside Council fostering team that applicants experience when they make an enquiry. It is crucial that prospective foster carers are made to feel informed, supported and encouraged from their initial contact with the fostering team, therefore the below chart outlines the changes that have been made to the process;



This outlines clearly the steps in the enquiry process, and shows clear roles and responsibilities for the Recruitment Officer, Fostering Manager and Social Workers.

This aims to ensure that;

- Enquiries are dealt with in a timely manner (within a 2 working day window);
- Enquiries are handled by the fostering team who can answer questions directly to give a friendly and personal approach;
- Enquirers are given clear and consistent information with every enquirer given the same level of professional service;
- Clear timescales indicate how enquiries should be dealt with consistently and swiftly.

Information packs and application packs will also be updated in line with the new fostering design to ensure they are appealing, engaging, clear and concise.

2. Building the Tameside Fostering Identity

Creating a recognisable visual identity for Tameside Council Fostering is important when considering the long-term strategy for fostering recruitment. Not only should this be something that is instantly recognisable and associated with both Fostering and Tameside Council, it is important that what this represents has our foster carers and young people at its core.

Currently, the Fostering logo with the hashtag #bestjobintameside is used across visuals and is the consistent image for fostering. This is currently undergoing a refresh, to ensure that it resonates most with our carers and the messages that are more likely to appeal to prospective carers.

From speaking to our Tameside Foster Carers, a recent report shows that:

*'Tameside carers expressed affinity with, and placed high value on the importance of caring for **local children**. Many respondent foster carers said they chose Tameside Council to become a foster carer, because they wanted to **help local children and support their own community**.⁸*

We will therefore incorporate a strong message of 'local' in the updated Fostering identity, which is currently in production with the design team. The key messaging will highlight Tameside more prominently, with the Headline and sub-messaging;

Foster for Tameside

Change a Local Child's Life

Carers also commented that they would like to avoid a corporate-style logo if possible, and encouraged the use of young people's artwork in our approach. We have listened to their ideas and are currently working with them to establish a friendly & appealing fostering identity that resonates with our fostering community and will appeal to prospective carers alike.

We will also ensure there are opportunities for young people's artwork to be featured in campaigns throughout the year.

A set of fostering visual guidelines will be produced in line with the new visual identity, and will ensure consistency across all channels which will strengthen the recognisability and recall of the fostering brand, crucial in any long-term strategy for success.

3. Creative approach

We sent out a survey to all foster carers to gather their opinions on the new fostering visuals, which will appear as a logo and on the website, on information packs and all marketing/recruitment materials etc. It was important to collect their views as we want to involve carers as much as possible in new processes so they know they are valued and their voices heard. In addition, they form a large part of our target audience so we wanted to know what resonates with them best will therefore attract new carers.

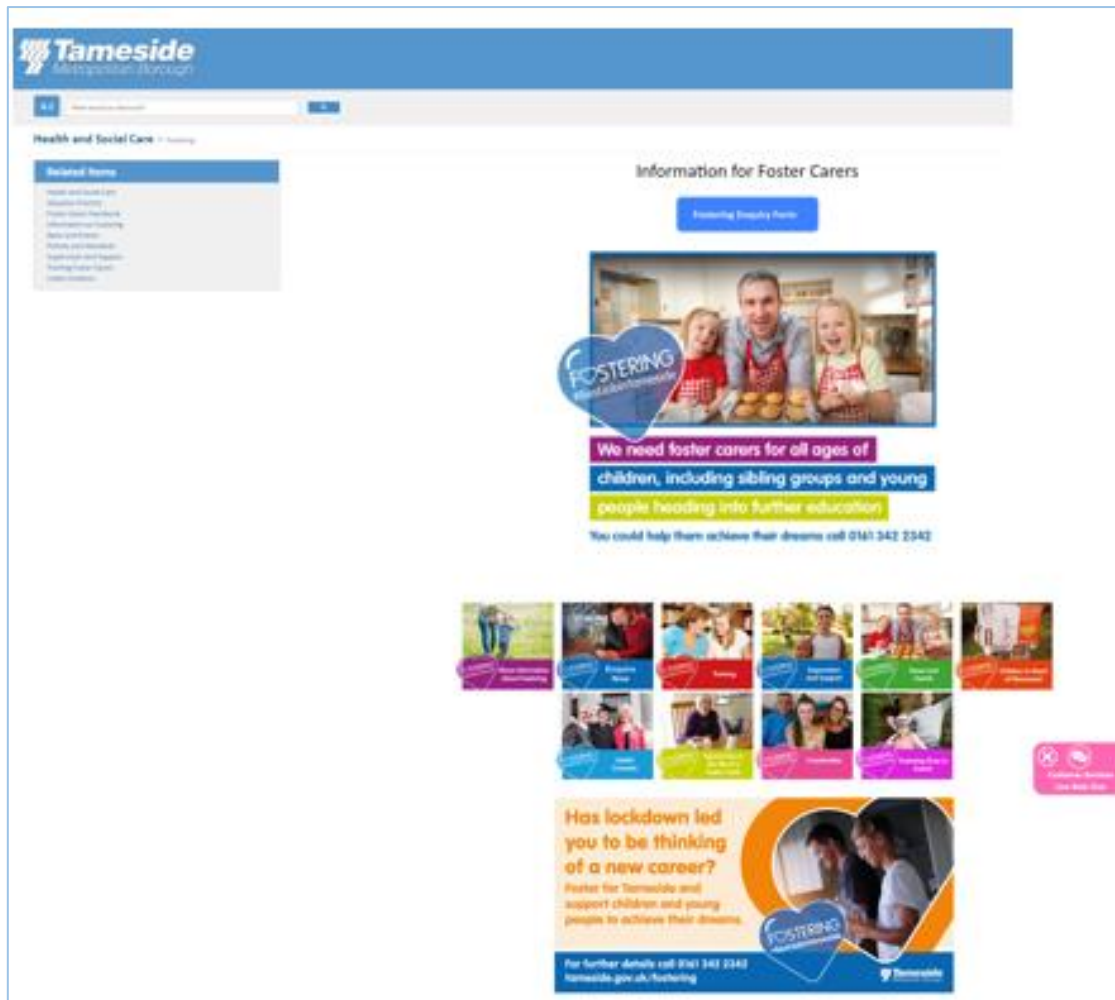
The survey presented carers with 5 different options created by our design team, and below shows the most popular design.

The visuals offer a fresh, modern and colourful design that appeals to a wide range of carers. We wanted to avoid appearing too corporate, as fostering is such a personal subject is brought to life best by its people. The heart symbol from existing visuals has been refreshed and included in the new designs, which represents the care aspect of fostering, naturally being the most important value. The colour palette has also been refreshed so that it is eye-catching and appealing, but toned down so as not to seem too child-like. Architectural sketches represent the local area to really bring out the 'Tameside' identity while imagery reflects carers from diverse backgrounds caring for children of all ages.

⁸ Tameside Fostering Service - Where every carer counts, Maria Greenwood, 2020

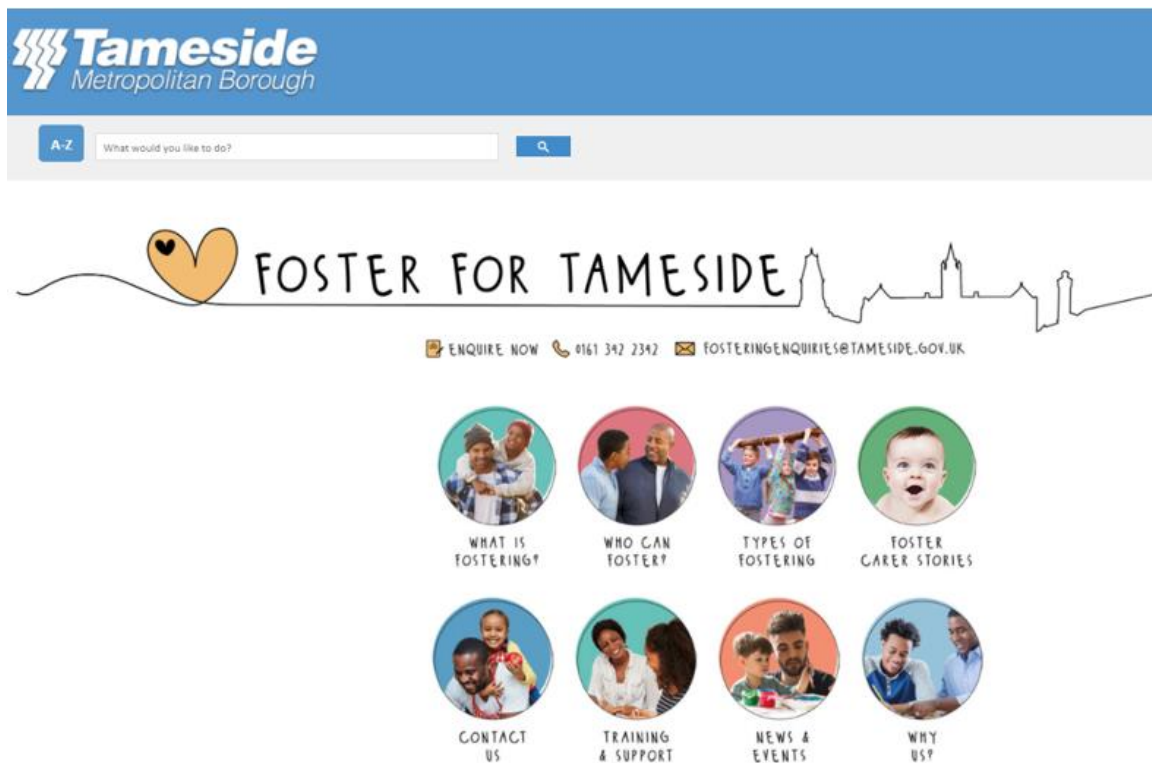
New Fostering Design – Website, logo & Social media Graphics

For comparison, the below shows the previous website design for fostering:

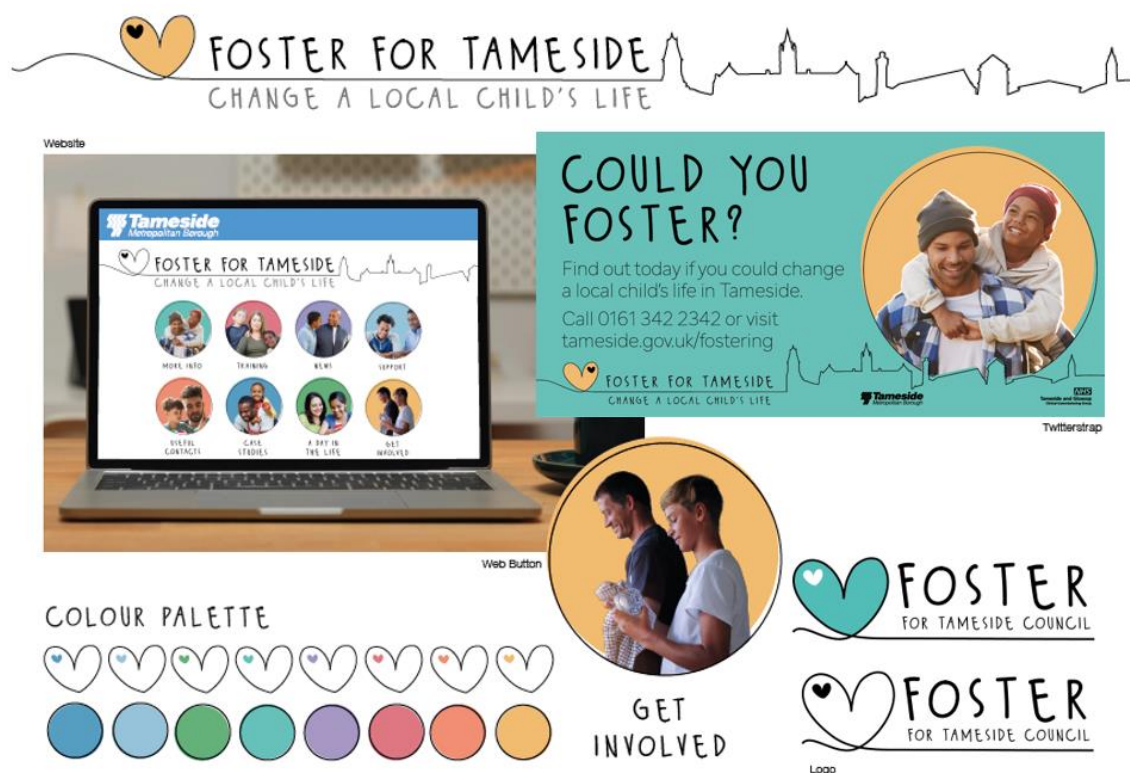


While the colours were bright and engaging, the key information was difficult to find and with many button options, there was too much additional information that resulted in the key messages getting lost. Buttons were further down the page, and key actions such as 'Contact us' could be much better placed nearer the top of the page. We recently added an online form capability for enquiries, which has a button at the top of the page. However, it was still difficult to navigate and to find clear, concise and relevant information.

The below shows the new design, which takes into account these issues. The banner at the top includes all contact details for enquiries, meaning that it is the first thing that potential foster carers see when they enter the page. The buttons are large, clear and streamlines to include only the most relevant information to make it as easy as possible to navigate. All information has been reworked to ensure that everything on the site is clear, relevant and concise, with case studies updated for foster carers to include updated stories and experiences.



We sent a selection of 4 new website designs, along with the new logo and poster designs (below) to our foster carers, welcoming their feedback. Their responses on the chosen option are detailed below.



Here are some of the comments made by carers through the survey;

- *I like the colour palette which features strong but not 'in your face' colours and I also like the visuals which suggest a new approach.*
- *Some of the others are too busy and distracting. The others are not as noticeable as option one*
- *Just looks more professional*
- *I just like the design*

The new design will therefore be rolled out across the website and for all marketing materials, campaigns and external documents. We will continue to listen to feedback of carers and enquirers and refresh key messages on a regular basis to ensure relevant and engaging communications.

Reaching Prospective Carers: Tameside Council Organic channels

1. Website

The website for fostering sits within the wider Tameside Council website. Website traffic statistics show that between October 2019 and October 2020, there were 5352 visits to the Tameside Council fostering landing page, with 3527 of these unique visits. The most visited pages are as follows, with number of clicks between 2,336 to 352 when reading from the top of the list down;

- More information about Fostering
- Job Description for Foster Carers
- An Overview Of Fostering
- A Guide To Task Centred Fostering
- Training
- Children in need of Placements
- Policies and Standards for Foster Carers

The remainder of the website pages (147 altogether) received an average of 34 clicks each, which reinforces the need to streamline the website's content to host only relevant, engaging and concise content.

To increase traffic to the site (and ensure a smooth user journey) the short-term plan (as shown above) is to update and refresh the current web pages for fostering with Tameside to ensure that they are easy to navigate, and host only useful, relevant and concise content. This will create a more user-friendly and appealing site that is more likely to encourage enquiries.

There will be useful information for prospective foster carers, in addition to new case studies and information about upcoming events.

Foster Carer Case Studies

From speaking with prospective foster carers, one of the things they find most useful is the ability to visualise how their family lives would adapt to having a foster child, and have the confidence that this would be the right decision for them.

Therefore, creating authentic resources that resonate with carers and allow them to envisage their future foster family setting is an important aspect of recruitment.

Our approach therefore will be to create a series of videos, photos and accounts of our existing foster carers to give a realistic and relatable view of fostering with Tameside. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, the best way to do this will be to interview carers virtually and record this for editing, which has been done successfully by other LAs. In the case where carers prefer not to be recorded, we can create written accounts of their experiences. This will enable us to bring the role of the foster carer to life on the website and across social media channels, ensuring content is relevant, authentic and relatable.

Content will be utilised across the organic channels for a consistent approach, with the fostering visual guidelines applied to ensure alignment across all assets and strength of messaging. A diverse range of carers will be encouraged to be involved to ensure a wide appeal to prospective applicants, including those who foster older children and those with complex needs.

In the future, we aim to create more professionally created content captured and edited by a videographer when the situation allows.

2. Online Enquiry Form

Currently, applicants for fostering can enquire via email, telephone or social media. There is also a customer services chatbot on the website.

It should be considered however that the social media pages cover the whole of the council rather than fostering specifically, which means that this makes it less likely for applicants to enquire via the pages, and the chatbot is also not fostering-specific.

The creation of an online enquiry form is therefore imperative in ensuring accessibility in the enquiry process for those who prefer this form of contact to phone or email. By establishing a clear, easy to use enquiry form that can be submitted digitally via the website, we enable those who visit the website after 5pm to make a straightforward enquiry without the need for email or phone.

This will enable a smoother applicant journey thus encourage applications, with applicants able to state their preferred time and method of contact. The start of a fostering enquiry can sometimes seem daunting, so requesting a call-back could take the pressure off that initial phone and enable our fostering team to offer a friendly introduction to fostering with Tameside. With 197 enquiries from April to September this year, there is an opportunity to maximise this number by introducing an online form.

3. Social Media Platforms

Currently, the Tameside Council Facebook and Twitter pages are used regularly to post fostering-specific content and to raise awareness for events and activity in the fostering calendar. With a network of 19,590 (FB) and 29,200 (Twitter) followers respectively, this offers a large and engaged follower base. The challenge with organic (unpaid) social media posts is that the Council pages are not fostering-specific so while there is a sizable audience, there are a large number of posts sent out each day, meaning fostering posts can get lost within wider communications. This includes a large amount of COVID related content at the moment and reinforces the need to implement paid social (explored in more detail further in the document).

The Comms team have previously run campaigns recently to recruit carers and continue to support fostering as one of its priorities. A recent example was a successful digital campaign including Paid

Search, online display and a boosted Facebook lead form, which ran in August and September of this year and brought in at least 37 additional enquiries. The majority of the leads were generated from the Facebook lead form.

We will continue to use the Facebook and Twitter pages to share fostering content, and as a recruitment tool to run further lead forms to garner enquiries. Instagram is a relatively untapped medium for fostering in Tameside (the approach to paid social will be explored further in the document) which will demonstrate how we will continue to use and elevate social media as a tool for recruitment.

4. Emails to the Tameside MBC database

Another powerful tool that will be utilised is the Tameside Email (CRM) database, with a sizeable number of 36,000 subscribers. A fostering-specific email will be sent to the database every other month, and will focus on the particular campaign theme for that month, and will include case studies of foster carers and clear CTAs and links to find out more and to enquire.

A recent example of an email campaign generated 1385 clicks through to the site, and most engaged demographic being females aged between 24-35 years.

To summarise, we will continue to use the following Tameside Council organic channels which are free of charge, these can be used year round and will support the paid digital approach which will be explored in section 8;

- Press release
- Website latest news
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Email
- Email signatures
- Steven's Weekly Brief
- Fostering Newsletter
- LiveWire

'Always on' Digital Marketing Approach

The needs for a an 'always on' approach was highlighted in a recent article by PR Week, where Karen Jones, Comms & Marketing Business Partner at Barnsley Council discusses recruitment;

The biggest challenge I always found was measuring conversion in terms of pinpointing which channels resulted in approved carers.

Adding to this challenge is that people think about fostering for a long time before taking action.

For example, a foster carer's story in the media may have planted the seed for someone, but it might be, say, a video on Facebook four years later that nudged them to take action – simply because the time was right for them.

Of course we all need to continually explore creative ideas, but for me, this demonstrates how important it is that, despite financial pressures, we continue to invest in marketing – keeping fostering front of mind and dispelling the many myths that put people off getting in touch.⁹

While there are certain times in the year such as the new year, April and September which are most popular for enquiries, The lulls that we see over the Summer and Christmas period mean that a push is needed to maintain enquires year-round. By adopting a consistent digital strategy, this will enable us to receive a steady flow of enquiries from high quality leads that are already in the consideration stage of the application journey. We aim to garner fewer, better quality enquiries to ensure efficiency in our recruitment.

By working with a well-established and experienced media partner, Local IQ, who already work with 12+ local authorities to improve their fostering recruitment, we can rest assured that the approach is tried, tested and works for fostering recruitment. From researching Local IQ and word-of-mouth recommendations, they deliver on objectives promised and are accountable in all areas.

We will also work with Local IQ to build Mosaic profiles of our target foster carers and geo-targeting those areas where people most likely to consider fostering live. This insight-driven and targeted approach will ensure efficiency that means minimum media wastage and relevant messages delivered to the right people at the right time.

The media plans encompass both Paid Search and Social Media Advertising, with proposal as follows;

- **Paid Search Engine Marketing** campaign served across Google and Bing, across the local area, using Local IQ's award winning conversion-based optimisation technology. This strategy is all about driving enquiries from "today's" foster carers – from the 1,200 to 1,500 searches that are being conducted locally on a monthly basis (**£1,000 per month**).
- **Social Media Ads** campaign aimed at the 24% of local adults most likely to be "considering" fostering. These leads tend to be from people earlier on in the consumer journey and can take a little longer to convert into registrations of interest, however they can be reached at a lower cost per lead than search engine marketing. We target three pools of people – emotively driven carers, socially qualified carers, and career carers, with relevant messaging. We adopt a multifaceted approach and also use Mosaic data to profile potential carers (**£750 per month**).
- **Expected Results** – 35 enquiries per month, 2.23 approvals – this is based on the search engine enquiries converting at 12% (which is entirely realistic based on the data we have available from existing campaigns) and the social enquiries at 4%.

Dates: We will run the Paid Search and Social Media ads for an initial period of 6 months starting January 2021, which gives enough time to monitor results and clearly evaluate how many quality leads are being generated from the campaign. This timescale will allow for effective insight into how many leads progress on to assessment stage of the application and therefore whether we continue with this approach in future campaigns, either as an 'always on' approach, or spread through the year in multiple digital recruitment drives.

⁹ *Effective Recruitment Campaigns For Fostering need a Mix of Digital and Offline Channels*, PR Week, Karen Jones, 2019

Future considerations:

We will evaluate the success of the new website design by comparing previous year numbers of visits to each page, online enquiry numbers, clicks and foster carer feedback. We can then take key learnings to apply to a standalone site which will give us increased capabilities, these are outlined below;

- A standalone **website** for fostering. Councils with external fostering sites see an improvement in results in addition to that ability to adopt an SEO strategy. This would cost between £2,000 and £3,500 depending on requirements;
- **SEO** strategy (possible when a standalone website is created), with the key deliverable of improving our organic performance with in Google search results;
- **Display Advertising and Retargeting** - strategy to ensure we continue to stay in front of prospective carers during their consideration phase with relevant messaging – we would serve these ads across the Google Display Network.

Dates: We aim to implement the above recommendations by April 2022, in line with the constant evolution of the fostering Marketing & Recruitment strategy (which will increase our digital capabilities in both functionality and targeting) for a truly forward-thinking and dynamic strategy.

Child-specific Recruitment Campaigns

We recognise that each child in the care of the local authority has individual needs, with some children requiring more specialist care. It is often more difficult to reach suitable prospective carers for these children, but a way in which we plan to do this is through child-specific recruitment campaigns via social and digital media and local press. By profiling the child, involving them in the process and ensuring to adopt a sensitive and anonymous approach we aim to attract the right type of carer for their needs. It will be crucial that each case is handled very sensitively and all parties, including the child, parents, existing carers and children's services work together and communicate well in order to make the campaigns a success. When a profile is agreed upon, this will be shared via social media channels and boosted by paid social spend in order to reach more people, targeting specifically e.g. health care workers for those with medical needs.

Offline Recruitment Strategies

Transfers from IFAs to Tameside Council Fostering Service

We understand that running directly competitive marketing activity with IFAs would not be the best approach for a number of reasons, one of them being that this could act as a catalyst for further reactive marketing activity from the IFAs, thus cancelling out any real impact of our own campaign messaging.

A more effective way we can appeal to IFA foster carers to transfer over to Tameside is at the point of considering a matching children in an IFA on placement on a long term basis. The children's social worker presents the business case at the placement tracking panel to request funding is approved on a long term basis to enable the match to proceed to the permanence panel. Before the

placement tracking panel consider agreeing to the request for long term financial commitment, the IFA carers will be asked to consider engaging in a conversation with the fostering recruitment and marketing officer.

Should the IFA foster carers agree to this, it will provide the opportunity for foster carers to learn more about the Tameside Council foster carer offer and make an informed judgement on whether they want to transfer. Benefits of fostering with Tameside will be highlighted, including incentives, training and support.

Once finalised, the new foster carer offer will mean a strengthened position to appeal to transfer carers, positioning Tameside Council an attractive alternative to fostering with an IFA.

At this stage, the Fostering Team Manager and Recruitment Officer will invite the IFA foster carer to a meeting, in which the benefits of a potential transfer will be discussed at length. Based on the discussions and the information provided, the foster carer can decide whether they choose to remain with an IFA, or begin the transfer process to Tameside Council.

We aim to target around 25 carers in the initial year, with a predicted success rate of 20%, which equates to 1 in 5 carers overall. .

Community Engagement & Events

Community engagement is key to ensuring maximised consideration for fostering within the borough. There are lots of ways to reach out to community groups and local businesses to work in partnership to achieve our recruitment goals. In non-COVID times, the fostering team would typically host information events at local venues, where potential applicants could come and chat to the team about fostering.

Due to the pandemic face-to-face events are currently not possible, so we must consider a more digital approach. Throughout the pandemic, we have hosted several information events across Zoom and from our own experience and speaking with other Local Authorities, the feedback is that these events are generally limited at garnering new enquiries, but more useful for providing further information for existing applicants.

Working with local schools and leisure organisations such as Active Tameside will be prioritised as they are places in which we know professionals, parents and families are already engaged with (therefore more receptive) to messages around children's care and fostering.

The way we engage with local businesses is also challenged in these times, as partnerships become more difficult due to the struggling economy and businesses being forced to shut and scale back operations, however there are still ways in which we can engage. For instance, a recent meeting with a marketing contact at IKEA outlined limitations to work together due to their existing partnerships with Children's organisations and challenges in sign off for local projects. However, they did agree to letting us host in-store events post-pandemic which would give opportunity for exposure and public engagement. They have also shared our campaign messaging and images in internal comms to engage staff with fostering, and as a care leaver himself, the contact has agreed to participate in future campaigns and case studies to help raise the profile for fostering in Tameside.

Different ways to engage could include campaign partnerships with charitable organisations, for instance we recently contributed to an article about fostering with Cycling UK, to encourage foster

families to get out and about throughout the autumn months. We can look to tie in to national campaigns to raise the profile of fostering in Tameside through a variety of channels, both TMBC and externally run.

Careers Websites

Although fostering is not considered a job as such, we must find ways to appeal to our 'Prospector' target foster carers, who view fostering as a profession, and one in which they can train and become more skilled in over time. We also must recognise the changing situations of families and individuals in the local community who, due to the pandemic, are facing changes in their situation. We must look to appeal to those who enjoy working from home and want a more flexible role in which they can make a real difference, or those that have been made redundant from a previous role and are looking for a more meaningful direction.

By placing advertisements with careers websites, including indeed, greaterjobs, LinkedIn and Charityjob, we look to capture those job seekers who may have worked with children or for charitable causes, and are looking for a more fulfilling role than previously. Other local authorities have started to adopt this approach in addition to their existing campaigns. While the notion of foster care as a job is not one that many of our carers share, it is important to find new ways to reach out to prospective carers who by nature will view fostering in different ways.

Out of Home Advertising

Outdoor advertising includes large digital and static advertising sites such as roadside billboards, outside supermarket screens, bus shelters, town centre screens and mall screens to name a few. This type of advertising will be explored more post-pandemic with the view that many commuters are currently working from home and many people in town centres are less likely to be out and about at the moment. However, outdoor advertising is a very useful way to reach large numbers of people with eye catching sites, and using Mosaic targeting heat maps, we can pinpoint the areas where prospective foster carers are most likely to live and activate in these sites.

End-of-Campaign Evaluation

Post-campaign evaluation is key to optimisation and efficiency of budget and media spend. Measuring the success of each campaign allows us to pinpoint exactly where marketing efforts should be amplified and budget maximised. By reviewing monthly figures for people reached and subsequent enquiries, leading on to ROI and assessment, a quarterly marketing report will be produced detailing all marketing activity and results. This will include analysis of the following;

- Facebook lead form enquiries
- Website click-through from Google Ads
- Online form enquiries
- Email click-throughs
- Impressions and interactions with social media posts
- Calls made to the fostering enquiry line (ask where the enquirer heard about fostering)
- Emails to the fostering mailbox
- Applications to job advertisements placed
- Enquiries following on from events

The accurate tracking of enquiry origin will be crucial in order to measure success of each channel, which will be recorded on enquiry.

This will allow us to see exactly which channels or techniques garner the most enquiries, and over time, show us who then progresses to assessment and approval stages. It's often difficult to pinpoint an enquiry to one particular channel as they may have watched a video on our social media a year ago, clicked through the website several times within the last few months to gather more information before calling or making an enquiry when the time is right. The customer journey before making a fostering enquiry is by nature unpredictable and lengthy, but we can ensure maximised exposure at both awareness (thinking about fostering) and action (ready to enquire) stages of the journey by adopting a consistent, multi-channel approach.

GM Recruitment and Assessment Hub

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority have released their statement of intent which outlines the plans for their £250k fostering marketing and recruitment drive. This details the approach, including lead generation and a shared front door for enquiries.¹⁰

There are some concerns over the reinstatement of a shared front door which brought challenges previously, not least due to each local authority's own screening processes and standards which risk being confused in this approach.

In addition, each local authority runs their own lead generation campaigns, with most if not all working with our proposed media partner, Local IQ, to activate these. By duplicating activity that is currently live, we risk sending out inconsistent messages to prospects of 'Foster for Tameside' and 'Foster for Greater Manchester' simultaneously.

However, by working closely with GMCA, we can try to align campaigns as much as possible to ensure a consistent approach, and share current practises regarding our enquiry processes and standards to ensure these are met by a third party.

Foster Carer Retention Strategy

Introduction

The support and retention of our existing foster carers is equally important to the recruitment of new carers in our strategy. Crucially, building and growing an engaged network of foster carers that feel valued in their roles will be incredibly valuable for our longer term recruitment goals. Through word-of-mouth recommendations and involvement in campaigns and events, our foster carers are our most valuable asset to help us in finding similar people.

COVID-19 impact on Foster Carer Retention

Comparing deregistration figures, for the 6 months leading up to (and including the start of) the pandemic from October 2019 – March 2020, there were 4 mainstream fostering households who were deregistered. From April 2020 – December 2020, there were 10 mainstream households who were deregistered. The reasons for deregistrations were as follows;

- 4 retired

¹⁰ GM Fostering – Recruitment and Assessment Hub, Statement of Intent, DCS Group – Friday 13th November 2020

- 2 due to illness/illness of a family member
- 1 sadly passed away
- 1 moved away
- 1 due to stress of the role
- 1 due to pressures of lockdown on placement

So while the number of deregistrations has risen, the reasons for this (except 2) were out of the control of the service, with just 2 citing reasons due to stress and dissatisfaction in the role.

Training & Support

Retention is a key area of focus for 2021/22 and beyond. Some of the retention strategies put in place due to the pandemic included a £300 payment for foster carers due to increased responsibilities and a digitalised training programme. The interim training programme was created which has been met with positive feedback from foster carers on engaging and relevant topics, content and delivery. An accompanying brochure to bring the courses to life & help them to feel engaging for foster carers. Carers have also reacted positively to the brochure and its contents.

Skills to Foster was also run successfully via Zoom throughout the lockdown; in July, 7 out of 11 households invited attended, with 6 moving forwards into assessment. In November, it was run with 5 households in attendance and 1 waiting for the next sessions due to temporarily having no Wi-Fi at their house.

In addition, each foster carer was gifted a Christmas card, £15 voucher and box of chocolates hand-delivered by the fostering team. Feedback has been overall very positive, with foster carers receiving these with thanks and feeling a boost in morale. A thank-you video is also being released to carers with personalised messages from members of the fostering service for Christmas.

Foster Carer Offer

Based on a recent audit of the current foster carer offer by Maria Greenwood in July 2020, the recommendations that the service would like to implement are currently going through the governance processes of review approval. The below strategies will therefore depend on this being approved, so may be subject to change depending on the final decisions.

Valuing our Foster Carers – Showing them we care

From speaking with many of our existing foster carers, one of the consistent comments is that carers feel undervalued in their roles. They often feel this due to a lack of recognition which they feel could be helped with simple gestures of recognition, even as small as a written 'Thank-you'. As part of our dual approach to recruit and retain carers, we must first look to listen to and address the grievances of current carers to move forwards by working together.

By outlining a series of incentives such as achievement awards, annual social events, leisure discounts and seasonal 'thank-you' gifts, we look to add value back to the important role of our carers. The following incentives are outlined in the recent Foster Carer Offer Review, in which in-depth discussions with carers revealed the best ways that Tameside can reward its carers;

- Introduce a Tameside foster carer long standing service award. The Tameside 'Every Carer Counts Long Standing Service Award' and presentation of a framed certificate, will be awarded to all practising foster carers, upon reaching five years of successful continuous service and every five years thereafter. At ten years and twenty years there will be a token gift presented and a letter of thanks from the Leadership of the council accompanying the award. All awards would be presented at the annual foster carer social event.
- Important to note is that the awards should be inclusive and be accessible to all carers who provide long standing services to children, (foster carers expressed during consultation, that this was an important issue for them as they do not want competitive, 'exclusive' awards to become established).
- Organise an annual '*Picnic in the Park*' for carers and their families, both fostered and birth children. To be organised by Tameside Foster Care Association, (who would receive an annual grant from the council which would include conditions to undertake responsibility for the organisation and co ordination of key foster care events including the Picnic in the Park event). ¹¹

The above recommendations will be implemented starting FY21/22 in line with budgets becoming available, which will start the groundwork for creating a strengthened foster carer community where each carer feels truly valued. However, we will be reaching out to carers before then, at Christmas, by sending each of them a gift voucher, box of chocolates and a Christmas card as a way of saying thank-you.

Newsletter

The existing fostering newsletter is sent out to the network on a monthly basis, with more frequent newsletters sent out to keep carers updated on key information regarding the pandemic. The newsletters typically include the latest COVID news, updates and guidance, fostering service updates, homeschooling resources and details of future events/activities that foster families can get involved. Now the fostering brand updates have been completed, the newsletter has been refreshed accordingly with the new template for consistency. Foster carers will also be encouraged to share their own updates and young people's achievements to elevate the content further and celebrate our young people.

Foster Carer Quarterly Meetings

Starting in January, the fostering service will host a meeting each quarter, this will be an open forum where we share news and updates with carers, and also encourage their feedback and suggestions. An example agenda is as follows for the initial session;

- Key Service updates
- Training updates
- Marketing & Recruitment updates
- Retention & working together with foster carers

¹¹ Tameside Fostering Service - Where every carer counts, Maria Greenwood, 2020

- Open discussion - what carers would like to get from the sessions

The aim is to run two meetings each quarter so that carers have the chance to attend either during the day or in the evening. The overarching aim of the meetings is to build relationships with carers and improve existing ways of working. This will be positioned to carers as a way of the fostering service reintroducing themselves and creating a friendly and relaxed space that encourages collaboration and the building of a network of carers with the fostering service. We hope that over time, carers can build trust in the service and the changes that are constantly being made to improve.

Surveys

For those unable to attend the meetings (and any carers who wish to share additional thoughts) we plan to run a quarterly Survey Monkey, to gather feedback from carers on their experience and any suggestions of how things could be done differently. It is important that we listen to the comments of carers and react to any consistent issues accordingly. Our foster carers will be encouraged to share their views on new incentives and processes so that we can ensure they are best suited and work for everyone.

Marketing & Communications Plan

The Marketing & communications plan below the marketing activities for remainder of the year, and then a further plan for 2021/22. This plan is not exhaustive and shall be added to depending on opportunities as they become available. This outlines the multi-channel approach, which ties into key events and occurrences in the calendar, both fostering-specific e.g. Foster Carer Fortnight, and more general e.g. Christmas.

The most important thing to remember is the 'always-on' approach to marketing activity that will aid a steady flow of enquiries year round. While it is important to maximise marketing efforts in key periods e.g. Foster Care Fortnight, importantly we must maintain the awareness and interest in fostering at all times. We have decided to go live with the digital marketing campaign from January onwards, as this will coincide with the new website updates to ensure a smooth journey to enquiry.

Objectives

- Increase the number of new local authority foster carers in Tameside
- Increase number of enquiries to foster for Tameside
- Raise awareness for fostering in Tameside
- Increase visits to fostering web pages

Target audiences

- Men and women living in Tameside aged 25-64
- Those with interests in charities, faith and community organisations
- Adults who work with children or have experience of working with children. Childminders, teaching assistants, sports coaches etc.

Key messages

- Change a Local Child's life
- Share your life, share their milestones

- Don't count yourself out – find out if you can foster today
- Foster care is a rewarding and flexible role
- Have you worked with children? We want to talk to you!
- We need foster carers of all ages, from all backgrounds
- Can you look after older children, teenagers and sibling groups?
- You can make a difference in your local area
- You can share young people's milestones and help them to achieve their dreams

For further information see www.tameside.gov.uk/fostering or call 0161 342 2342

Dates	Activity	Key Messaging	Platforms
FY20/21 Interim Marketing Activities			
November 2020	CRM email to TMBC Database	Change a local Child's Life Pandemic – change in career	Email
	5x Weekly social media posts on TMBC channels	Change a local Child's Life Pandemic – change in career	Facebook Twitter
	Tameside Radio Campaign	Recruitment Drive	£288
December 2020	Foster Carer Gifting	Merry Christmas & Thank you to our Carers	Gifts sent directly to carer's homes Boxes of Chocolate Amazon Vouchers Christmas Cards £4,000
	Fostering Team Virtual Video 'Christmas Card'	Merry Christmas & Thank you to our Carers	Facebook Twitter Website Internal Comms
	Social Media Posts	12 myths of Fostering videos	Facebook Twitter
	5x Weekly social media posts on TMBC channels	Change a local Child's Life Sharing of current fostering news stories & updates	Facebook Twitter Instagram
January 2021	New Tameside Fostering Design Launch	Change a Local Child's Life	Website Facebook Twitter Instagram

			CRM Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
	New Year Recruitment Drive	Change a local Child's Life New Year, New Start Visuals flexed to a variety of demographics to ensure inclusivity.	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 MEN Advertorial £1,500 Facebook Twitter Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
February 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Recruitment Messaging TBC	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
	LGBTQ+ Month	Encouraging more LGBTQ+/same-sex couples and individuals to consider fostering	Gaydio joint campaign with 6 LA's in total Bury, Rochdale, Oldham, Bolton & Stockport Podcast with foster carers, shared on radio slot, respective social media channels and Gaydio Website £200 Facebook Twitter Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
	Care Day 2021 19 th February	Celebration of children and young people with care experience	Care leaver's blog Facebook Twitter Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire

	Share the Love Campaign	<p>Share the love, foster for Tameside</p> <p>Ask Fostering families how they 'Share the love'</p> <p>Change a Local Child's Life</p>	<p>Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 (flexed to campaign messaging)</p> <p>Facebook Twitter Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire</p> <p>Social posts with foster families quotes and the hashtag #sharethelovetameside</p>
March 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Recruitment Messaging TBC	<p>Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750</p>
	Easter Art Competition	Share young people's work & continue with key recruitment messages	<p>Facebook Twitter Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire</p>
	Half-term Cycling Focus – in partnership with Cycling UK/Active Tameside	<p>Get outside this half term</p> <p>Stay Active</p>	<p>Cycling UK Website Cycling UK social channels Active Tameside social channels Facebook Twitter Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire</p>

FY21/22 Marketing Activities			
Dates	Activity	Key Messaging	Platforms
April 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Change a Local Child's Life	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
	Easter Egg Gifting to Foster Children	Happy Easter!	Gifting of Easter Eggs to Foster Children & Birth Children £1000
May 2021	Foster Care Fortnight	Messaging TBC – local focus tied to national campaign (theme revealed in Jan 2021)	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 (flexed to FCF campaign messaging) Tameside Reporter Full page £525 Tameside Radio 2-week ad £300 Plus homepage takeover £250 MEN My Tameside Web Takeover (costs TBC) Tameside Radio Slot – community interview (free of charge) Facebook Twitter CRM Email to database Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
	Annual Picnic in the Park – to coincide with Foster Care Fortnight	Celebration of Foster Carers & children	Outdoor Social Event 'Picnic in the Park' Refreshments Entertainment e.g. bouncy castle £5,000 (FCA)

	Foster Carer Job Adverts	Foster Carer Recruitment Drive	Greaterjobs Linkedin Charityjob £1,000
June 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Change a Local Child's Life	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
	Bike Week	Encouraging Foster Families to take up cycling & get active for the summer	Cycling UK Website Cycling UK social channels Active Tameside social channels Facebook Twitter Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
July 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Change a Local Child's Life (updated messaging TBC)	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
	Manchester/Tameside Pride	Spotlight on same sex foster couples, inclusivity	Foster Carer Stories Facebook Twitter CRM Email to database Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
August 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Foster for Tameside (updated messaging TBC)	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
September 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Foster for Tameside (updated messaging TBC) Empty Nesters Campaign Back to uni, spare bedroom messaging	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 CRM Email to database
	Foster Carer Job Adverts	Foster Carer Recruitment Drive	Greaterjobs Linkedin Charityjob £1,000

	Foster Carer Awards Afternoon Tea Event	Celebration of Carers and presentation of long-standing achievement awards	Event at local venue Afternoon Tea Refreshments Presentation of awards £5,000
October 2021	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Foster for Tameside (updated messaging TBC)	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
	Sons & Daughters Month	Celebrating Sons & Daughters and using positive PR for recruitment drive	Gifting to Sons & Daughters £2,000 Voucher or similar Facebook Twitter Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
	National Care Leavers Week	Celebrating our Care Leavers	MEN Advertorial £2,000 Care Leavers stories Facebook Twitter CRM Email to database Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
	Halloween Party/gifting	Happy Halloween to our foster families	A Halloween trick or treat pack sent to all foster families. £1,000
November	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Foster for Tameside (updated messaging TBC)	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
December 2021	Christmas Party	Merry Christmas & Thank you to our Carers	Party hosted at local Venue Santa & gifting for all children Entertainment Refreshments £5,000

	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Foster for Tameside (updated messaging TBC)	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750
	Foster Carer Gifting	Merry Christmas & Thank you to our Carers	Boxes of chocolates given to each foster carer household £700 Christmas Cards £70
January 2022	New Year Recruitment Drive	New Year, New Start	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 Facebook Twitter CRM Email to database Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
January 2022 continued	Foster Carer Job Adverts	Foster Carer Recruitment Drive	Greaterjobs Linkedin Charityjob £1,000
February 2022	Share the Love Campaign	Share the love, foster for Tameside Change a Local Child's Life	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 (flexed to campaign messaging) Facebook Twitter Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire Quotes from foster families to share on social with hashtag #sharethelovetameside
	Care Day 2022 (exact date TBC)	Celebration of children and young people with care experience	Care leaver's blog Facebook Twitter Press release Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire

March 2022	Easter Art Competition	Share young people's work & continue with key recruitment messages	Facebook Twitter CRM Email to database Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire Prize £50
	Half-term Cycling Focus – in partnership with Cycling UK/Active Tameside	Get outside this half term Stay Active	Cycling UK Website Cycling UK social channels Active Tameside social channels Facebook Twitter Website homepage Steven's Weekly Brief LiveWire
	Digital Campaign (continuation)	Recruitment Messaging TBC	Paid Search ads £1,000 Paid Social ads £750 £44,383

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