

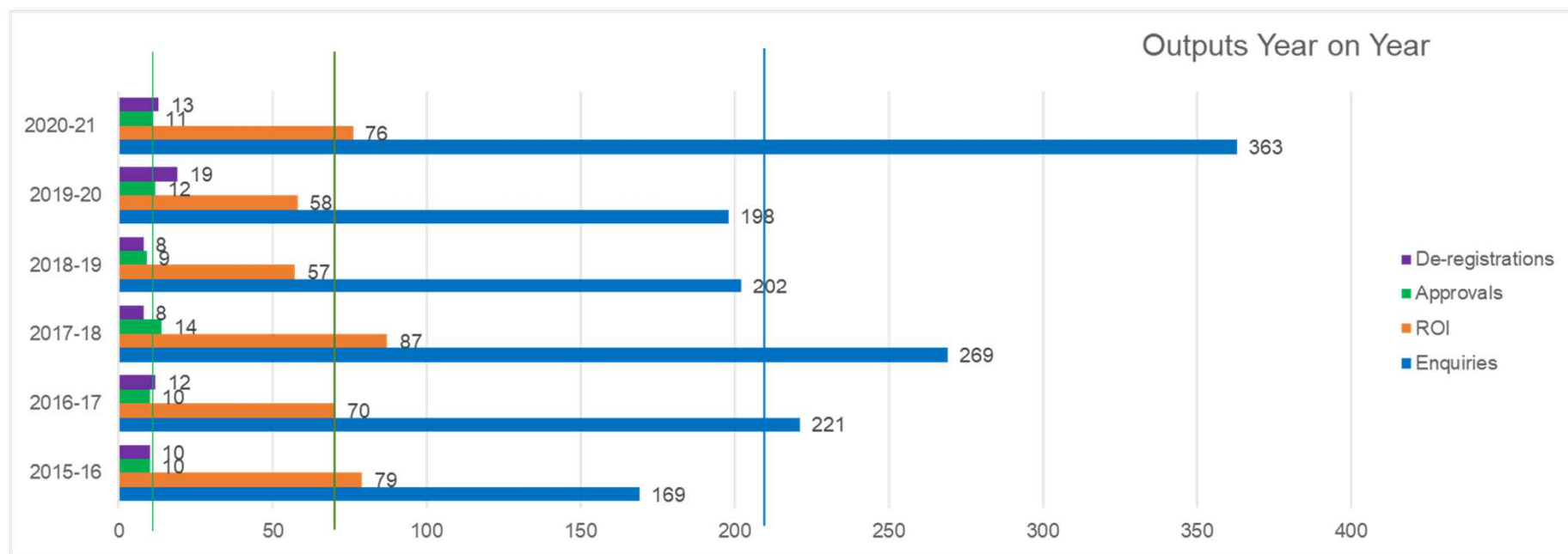
# **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

6<sup>th</sup> September 2020

## **The Recruitment of Foster Carers in Bolton**



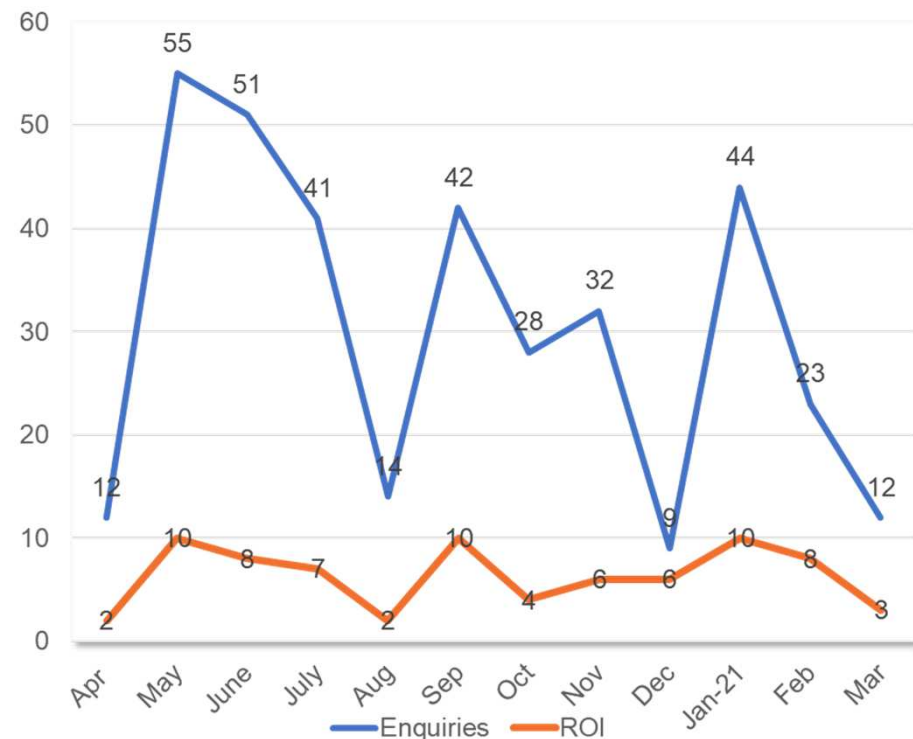
# Marketing Developments



2020 – 2021 delivered the highest number of enquiries over the past 5 years due to a rolling marketing campaign being delivered for the first time and the implementation of a dedicated Marketing Officer

# Enquiry Leads & ROI's

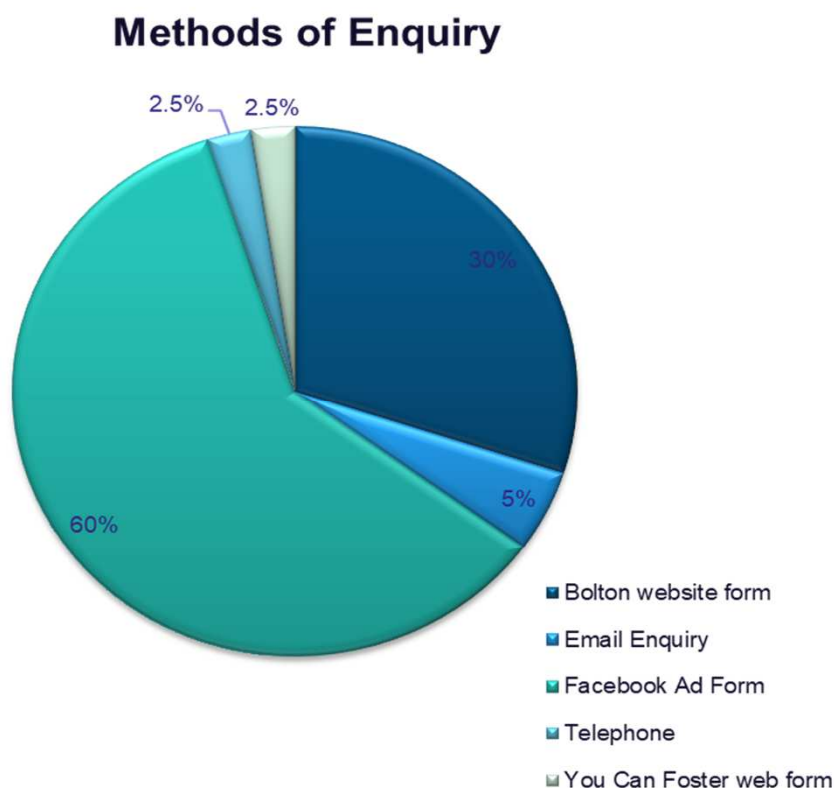
- 363 new enquiry leads were received during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020
- There was an 81% increase in enquiries from 2019/20 figures
- Most popular months for enquiries were May (which incorporated Foster Care Fortnight), June, January & September, which coincided with the months in which the digital marketing campaign was active
- 76 enquirers went on to complete a Registration of Interest (ROI)



# Journey to Approval

Totals for the period 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2020 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021	
Number of Enquiry Leads	363
Number of Registration of Interest Forms (ROI) Completed	76
Number of Initial Visits	55
Number of STF Training Courses	6
Number of STF Attendees	60
Number of Approved Carer's	11
Number of De-registrations	13
Number of Tracker Entries	98

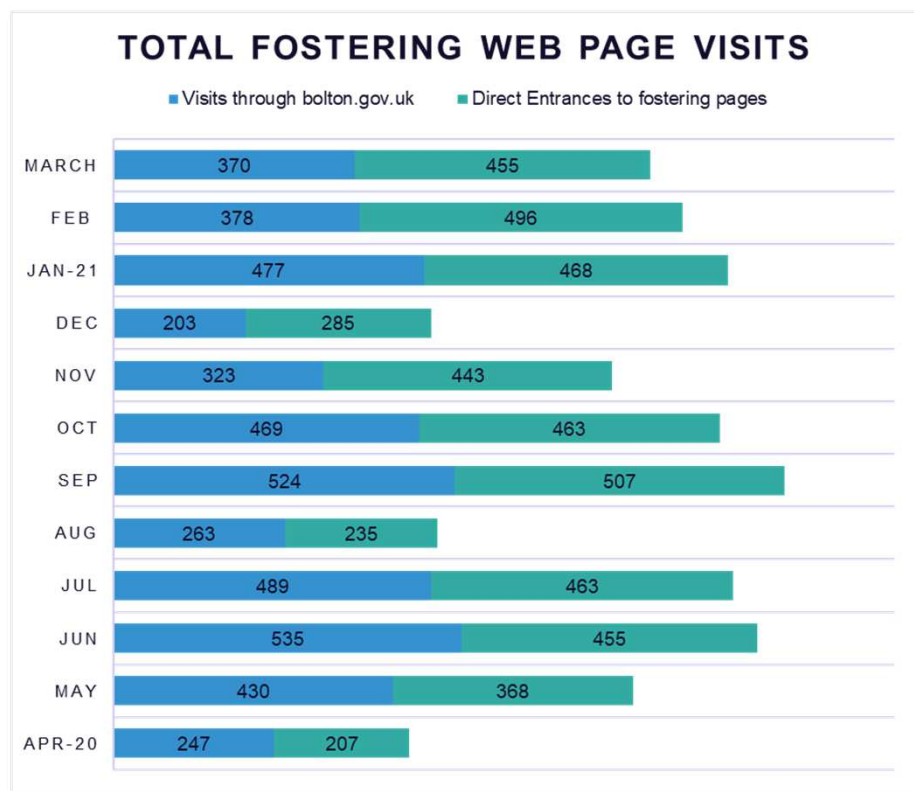
# How people enquired...



60% of all enquiry leads and 26% of all ROI's have come through our **Facebook advertising**

30% of all enquiry leads and 54% of all ROI's have come through the **Bolton fostering web form on the Council website**

# Visits to Website



N.B. No paid campaigns ran in December, August or April

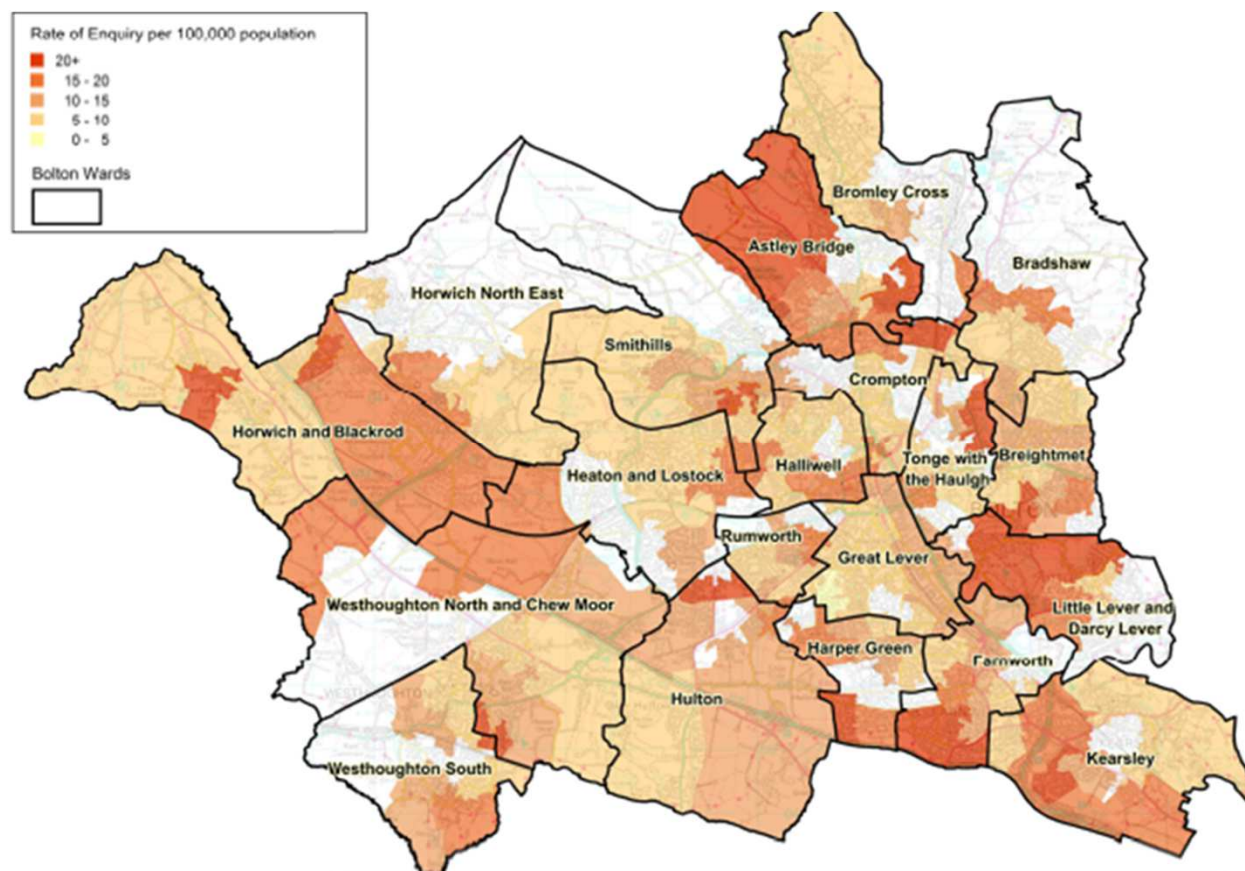
**Visits to the fostering web pages** increased by an average of 89% during months when the paid digital campaign was active

Our **Paid Search campaign** accounted for approx. 50% of direct visits to our fostering web pages

# Who enquired?

Enquiries came from a broad geographical area of Bolton

- 85% of enquiries received were from women
- 24% of enquiries were from the BAME community
- 15% of enquirers had no spare room



# Recruitment Summary

- We have re-organised the Fostering Service to create a dedicated Recruitment Team to provide more timely responses, grip and drive
- A tracker has been devised for assessments with clear headlines and timescales to ensure senior management oversight and facilitate challenge in Performance Board
- There is a clear target timescale set for allocating ROI (registration of interests) and completing initial visits and assessments
- Schedule of rolling program of Skills to Foster training courses to avoid built in delays
- Assessments are booked into panel upon allocation of an assessing social worker with a 6-month target for completion of the assessment
- Stage 1 and stage 2 of the assessment process running concurrently to reduce assessment timescales



## **Forecast for 2021 - 2022**

- Projecting 20 approved carers in 2021 – 2022 which is double the number of carers from 2020 – 2021
- A rollover of the impact of improved marketing should extend the improvement into 2022/23
- Retention of carers also improving with 13 resignations in 2020/21 as compared to 19 in 2019/20

# The Fostering Career

- We currently have 192 mainstream foster carer households providing 241 placements – the 3rd best performing L.A. in the GMCA for placing children 'in-house'
- In addition, there are 69 family and friend's placements but still have 73 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements
- **BUT 44 are over the age of 60 so over the next 5 years may have to recruit up to 8 carers p.a. just to 'stand still'**
- The average age of mainstream foster carers is between 45 – 59 and on average foster for Bolton for 9 years, with 10% of carers fostering with us for between 20 - 40 years, 37% between 10 – 20 years
- Information gathered from various forums suggests foster carers feel supported by their Supervising Social Workers. When the decision is made to leave fostering it is often due to retirement
- Foster carer representative on the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure their views are represented
- There is a tracker in place to monitor and review void placements for senior manager oversight to best ensure maximum efficiency in the system

# Retention

The key principles of retention within a Fostering Service are to **respect, value, nurture and appreciate the work force**

- A **monthly newsletter** is distributed to carers to ensure they are kept up to date with any developments in the Local Authority and share information about resources and topics of interest
- There are a **range of support groups** available to carers and children which have continued during the Covid 19 pandemic
- **Voice 4 You event** annually to celebrate the achievements of our Looked After Children
- **Buddy System** ensures all carers are linked to an experienced foster carer to provide them with guidance and support
- **Discount card for carers** to ensure accessibility to a range of activities
- The **Foster Carer Forum** ensures carers meet regularly with the manager to share their views, concerns and compliments
- We have held **celebration events for long standing foster carers** recognising their continued service to the department and the children of Bolton
- **Involving foster carers in our recruitment** activities such as during skills to foster training
- **Foster carers supporting with initial visits** to utilise their skills, knowledge and experience



# Future Developments

- Pooling resources and expertise with other GM Authorities re :-
  - Home adaptation scheme
  - Joined up marketing campaign on a sub-regional basis
  - Development of a recruitment / enquiry / assessment hub
- Deep dive into fostering data and continued evaluation of recruitment activity which is reviewed through the recruitment meetings
- Continue to build on foster carer recruitment year on year underpinned by high quality recruitment activity
- Possible Mockingbird model to be launched in Bolton to enrich placement stability, retention and enhance the current short break offer



# Conclusion

- Bolton Needs Foster Carers
  - Too many children still placed out of borough and in more expensive IFA placements where outcomes are less certain
  - Bolton is facing a significant demographic challenge in the next few years
- Significant progress has been made but more work to be done
- As an Elected Member you will have significant local connections with the residents and business community in Bolton
- As a Corporate Parent can you do more to support our need for more foster carers for Bolton's looked after children?