

Fostering Agency Report

Purpose

1.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the executive side of the local authority:

- a. Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
- b. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months;
- c. Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration and National Minimum Standards for fostering.

(Standard 25.7)

The Fostering Agency is required to produce a Statement of Purpose updated on an annual basis. The current Statement of Purpose was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in September 2018. The Statement of Purpose has been updated for 2019 and is attached as appendix 1.

This report covers the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019.

1.2 Summary for Children and Young People

This report covers the work undertaken by the fostering service and explains how the fostering service recruits new foster carers through social media channels, Derby City Council's website and targeted events. The report explains the role of the fostering panel and provides figures for the numbers of carers approved and the number of carers who have left the service. Complaints received about foster carers from a range of different people are also included, particularly if this has led to de-registration of a foster carers approval.

During 2018/19 one of the major developments has been the strategic plan set out within a programme of work under the remit of the Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board. One of the workstreams has focussed on the recruitment of foster carers through improving our marketing and sales approach and streamlining the assessment process.

The key areas of improvement have been to increase our presence on social media using Google Ads, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Work is also underway to

produce a new Marketing Strategy. Alongside the recruitment and marketing workstream there is another workstream focussing on the retention of foster carers.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To approve the annual Fostering Agency report and Statement of Purpose.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 To comply with guidance and regulations and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.
- 3.2 To increase recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Supporting information

- 4.1 Fostering panels have a crucial role to play in the provision and monitoring of foster care for children. The membership of Derby City's fostering panel complies with Guidance and Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 for Fostering Services. The central list (regulation 23) consists of an independent chair and vice-chair, both of whom have professional experience of children placed away from their birth family and are competent at chairing complex meetings. Panels meet twice monthly.
- 4.1.1 Other members of the panel include a foster carer from a different local authority, a fostering social worker representing the service with at least three years post qualifying experience, a care-experienced young person and other independent members with relevant experience related to children in care and safeguarding.
- 4.1.2 The panel is currently supported by a professional advisor (Head of Service) and also has access to a specialist adult medical advisor and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker is the Service Director for Children's Integrated Services.
- 4.1.3 Panels provide a quality assurance role to the fostering service provider, on the quality of reports and practice. The foster panel chair, professional advisor and fostering managers meet twice a year to consider quality assurance and performance issues relating to the service and training needs of the panel members. Panel members receive an annual appraisal undertaken by the panel chair and panel advisor.
- 4.1.4 **Overall experience and ability of panel members and their contribution to decision making – listening and communication skills**

The independent chair of the fostering panel is required to contribute to the annual report and has provided the following summary:

Panel members have a variety of backgrounds and a relevant mix of personal and work-related experience, including child protection, residential child care, fostering

and adoption, ex-child in care, police, and training skills in social services. They bring these skills and experience to bear in each panel session and I feel everyone contributes to the discussion and decision making. Where there are matters of concern or omissions in reports presented to panel, the issues are raised and discussed in an open and enabling manner. There is an atmosphere of respect towards each other and a willingness to share thoughts and experience which inform challenges, both to panel members and to social workers attending panel.

We aim to make panel a welcoming and friendly experience for foster carers who attend and panel members are respectful to them, and to social workers, whilst still being able to challenge and ask questions. This can be a difficult balance to achieve but panel members do have the experience, skills and sensitivity to do this.

4.2 Attitude of panel members to ensuring that fostering placements are appropriate and meeting the child's needs

Panel is aware of its responsibilities in its quality assurance role and always places the welfare of the child at the forefront of discussions. There is a mechanism within the service for panel's concerns to be addressed at regular meetings with managers and if specific issues arise during discussion the panel adviser will take them back to managers. At each meeting panel consider whether action points have been addressed from previous panels. Several members have a working background in the fostering service and have a real understanding of how the fostering service works and one panel member is an ex-child in care, so we do have an explicit role in hearing the voice of the child. Concern by panel members in ensuring the child's needs are met is an important part of panel business as that concern informs and assists in panel decisions.

4.3 Commitments and awareness to safeguarding and confidentiality

Safeguarding is very much at the centre of panel discussions and in questions asked of social workers and foster carers attending.

Between April 2017 and March 2018 there was one referral made to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) which met the threshold for further investigation. This referral related to a physical injury a child had sustained and was unsubstantiated. All cases dealt with under LADO procedures require a full report to foster panel to consider any changes to approval status, support and training needs.

4.4 Ability of panel members to address diversity issues

Panel members always consider diversity issues in relation to each assessment report or review and all panel members have attended relevant training. Panel are proactive in advocating help for relevant services for foster carers who care for disabled children and young people. We are aware that we do not always have the answers but we do challenge and raise questions.

4.5 **Areas of practice that influence how effectively panel can function?**

Our central role in hearing the voice of the child can be difficult to achieve if the necessary paperwork is missing, especially via the child's social worker or lack of information from a child's review. This has been an on-going concern raised with the panel advisor.

- 4.5.1 In cases of emergency placements, children and young people have been placed with foster carers who do not meet the approval criteria recommended by panel. This can override panel effectiveness. This is understandable in terms of finding a necessary emergency placement and allows further discussion to take place about the safety of the placement and whether there should be additional support to safeguard the carers and the child. The Panel Adviser's role is as important as panel members, aiding communication between panel and ensuring changes in policy and practice are implemented.

- 4.6 Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months.

The current fostering marketing officer joined the council in May 2017.

The full time permanent marketing officer is based in the councils Communications Team and works closely with key staff in the Fostering service. Monthly marketing meetings are held to plan for the main recruitment events during the year. In addition to keep abreast of regional activity the marketing officer and recruitment officer attend the East Midlands regional recruitment forum to share new marketing initiatives.

- 4.6.1 The fostering and adoption marketing budget for 18/19 was £19,000. Key activity areas in the marketing plan for 2018/19 have been:

- Three major targeted events held in May and October 2018 and February 2019
- New campaign development and implementation for 2019 titled 'Change a life'
- Council tax leaflet drop to all households in Derby City
- Radio campaigns linked to the main events
- Fostering fortnight
- Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender week & Derby Pride
- Roadside signage displayed promoting the Change a life campaign. Targeted areas were Oakwood, Allestree, Pride Park and City Centre
- The Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board was established in February 2019 to recognise the significance of foster carer recruitment as a shared council wide priority and the ongoing financial implications incurred as a result of the increased number of looked after children being placed with external fostering agencies.

- 4.6.2 The marketing strategy for 2017-2020 was produced with the focus on the quality of service, the needs of children as the primary concern, and meeting the needs of our foster carers. One of the action points identified by the Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board is the need for a revised marketing strategy. Work has already started on identifying the key marketing objectives for the next few years to provide a high quality and effective fostering service to meet the needs of the children in our care. The strategy's aim is to ensure that all people who are interested in fostering are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval and support services.
- 4.6.3 In August 2019 approval for a Payment for Skills scheme was agreed to aid the recruitment and retention of foster carers. Recruitment of foster carers is a strategic priority for the council and increasing sufficiency of our own internal resources will positively impact on budget pressures. The scheme proposes a fundamental change from how foster cares are financially recompensed and moves away from the child's level of need to a payment system based on the foster carer's level of assessed and approved skills through meeting the required training for each payment level. The implementation of payment for skills is designed to bring Derby City in line with other East Midlands local authorities and provide a competitive package of remuneration with the private sector.
- 4.6.4 Fostering allowances are required to be reviewed annually in line with the rate of inflation. Derby City's allowance payment rates are one of the highest across the region. DMT agreed the recommendation to increase the basic weekly allowances by 2.3% from April 2018 for all age groups. A provision was made in the 2018/19 budget for this inflationary increase of £41,553 which was contained within the overall fostering allowance budget.

Age of child	Weekly allowance for 2018/19 per child
0-4	£149.51
5-10	£170.31
11-15	£212.02
16-18	£257.93

The weekly allowances for 2019/20 have been frozen at the above rates.

4.7 Recruitment activity between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019

Initial Enquiries	Information Packs Sent	Initial Visits	Number of households invited to apply	Returned Applications	Approvals
169	131	78	43	25	Mainstream 11 Friends & Family

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Mainstream approvals – these are carried out under The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and allows the fostering service provider to carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable and meet the National Minimum Standards for fostering (NMS 13).

Friends & Family – Regulations 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations set out arrangements for the temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer in exceptional circumstances for up to 16 weeks to allow an immediate placement and sufficient time for a foster carer approval process to be undertaken.

- 4.7.1 Of the 169 fostering enquiries, 62% were White British and the majority were between the age of 30-59 years.
- 4.7.2 On-line enquiries and telephone enquiries to the fostering recruitment team account for 69% of enquiries and 18% are from face to face contact such as information events and drop-in sessions. The remaining 13% of enquiries come via email, foster carers and word of mouth.
- 4.7.3 There were 3 main targeted events during the year with a total of 23 prospective fostering households taking the first step to find out more information on becoming a foster carer. This resulted in 11 initial visits (those who did not have initial visits did not want to take their enquiry further at that time). Following the initial visits 7 households were invited to make a formal application. Out of these 7 households the service received 3 completed applications and the 4 remaining households decided not to take their enquiry further. Out of the 3 completed applications received, all have since withdrawn – 1 for health reasons and 2 felt it wasn't the right time to continue with an assessment. For events held since April 2019 there has been significant increase in marketing activity and investment in advertising through the use of internal and external signage. The introduction of Google Ads has created a steady stream of enquiries by placing Derby City Fostering Service at the top of Google searches.

- 4.7.4 From the 169 initial enquiries 131 information packs were sent out. Information packs are not always sent out and this is often due to telephone consultations with the applicant being ruled out early (i.e. call back from fostering social worker reveal family circumstances that would prevent them from proceeding).

Reasons why enquiries have been closed at initial contact include:

- Recent relationship break-up
 - Recent bereavement
 - Safeguarding concerns
 - Smoker and wants to care for under 5's
 - No spare bedroom and wants older children
 - Own children too young
 - Derby City allowances are too low/can't afford to foster
 - Undergoing fertility treatment
 - Under 21
 - Recent care leaver
 - No response to follow ups
- 4.7.5 78 initial visits were conducted within this period and 43 application forms (55%) were left with the prospective applicant(s). Application forms are left with all potential households that demonstrate the capacity and willingness to commence the assessment, meet statutory regulations for fostering prior to attending fostering panel.
- 4.7.6 With regards to the 43 applications, 25 were completed and returned to the Fostering Service (58%). The majority of these were returned within 20 days of the form being left with them to consider their options. Tracking activity was undertaken on the 18 households who did not return a completed application form. 11 households did not respond ending in the enquiry being closed down. 7 households decided it was not the right time to pursue fostering.
- 4.7.7 There were 18 households approved at fostering panel. 11 approvals were mainstream foster carers and 7 were family and friends carers.
- 4.7.8 There were a total of 11 withdrawn applications during this 12 month period. These were all initiated by the applicants during stage one of the assessment process. The most common reasons for people withdrawing from the process were due to health issues or changes in personal circumstances.

4.8 Recruitment activity since April 2019

Since 1st April 2019 the service has approved 9 new households - 7 mainstream and 2 Family and Friends carers. The mainstream approval categories are shown in the table below. The family and friends approvals provided placements for 2 looked after children.

Approval category
Short-term 0-2 yrs 1 child
Short-term placements age 8-18 yrs. Respite placements age 8-18 yrs for 2 children
Respite/Emergency placements for up to 2 children if siblings, 5-10 yrs
Short-term age 5-18
Respite age 5-18 for 1 child or 2 if siblings
Short-breaks for children with disabilities 5-12 yrs 1 child
Emergencies and respite 7-18 yrs 1 child
Respite 1 child 3-10 yrs

- 4.8.1 As of the end of September 2019 there are 27 fostering assessments being undertaken. 21 assessments are mainstream and 6 are family and friends. All assessments are on target to be completed before the end of the financial year. This would bring a total of 28 mainstream approvals for the year 2018/19. The family and friends approvals will provide placements for 10 looked after children reducing the demand on mainstream "in house carers" and commissioned Independent Fostering Agency placements. One of these placements is for a sibling group of 3 and two are for sibling groups of 2.

Mainstream approvals since April 2019	7
Mainstream assessments currently being undertaken	21
Mainstream carers invited to submit applications	6
Potential forecast for 2019/20	34

Family & Friends approvals since April 2019	2
Family & Friends assessments currently being undertaken	6
Potential forecast for 2019/20	8

4.8.2 Analysis of recruitment events held May and September 2019

Recruitment event held 21 st May 2019	
Number of households attended	21
Number of initial visits allocated	20
Reason for 1 not allocated	Not the right time
Number of applications received	6

Recruitment event held 17 th September 2019	
Number of households attended	17
Number of initial visits allocated	10
Reasons for 7 not allocated	1 re-directed to adoption 1 IFA transfer 3 being tracked due to moving out of area 2 on hold due to personal circumstances
Number of applications received	None due to initial visits in progress

4.9 De-Registrations:

There were a total of 25 de-registrations presented at panel between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019. The majority of de-registrations were due to carers making the decision to retire after many years of fostering.

4.9.1 Out of the 25 de-registrations:

- 1 household expressed a wish to adopt the child in placement and consequently resigned from their fostering role after successfully being approved to adopt.
- 3 households transferred to independent fostering agencies
- 7 of the de-registrations were from family and friends carers who no longer had a child in placement
- 14 resignations were due to foster carers retiring from the role

4.10 Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration and National Minimum Standards for fostering

The drive and impetus to increase the council's fostering households and review our retention initiatives is a strategic priority being led by the council's corporate fostering board. The Derby Foster Carers Association is represented by the FCA chair and the two workstreams also include representation from existing foster carers for the council. As already mentioned payment for skills has been agreed and three foster carer briefings have been held to explain the new criteria for carers wishing to achieve a payment level that reflects their training and development. Recruitment and retention data is monitored on a monthly basis to forecast the target of 30 approved households during 2019/20.

- 4.11 The Derby Foster Carers Association (FCA) has continued to develop since it originally launched in 2013. The FCA has seen an increase in the number of carers attending social events, with a number of new and existing carers attending for the first time. There has been an increase in charitable donations, which has enabled the FCA to fully fund a variety of outings and activities for carers and young people.
- 4.11.1 Key committee members periodically meet with fostering team managers to share social work practice issues and changes taking place in the service. This year the FCA were consulted on the proposal to introduce the payment for skills scheme. Key members of the FCA committee are involved in the current workstreams and are able to offer advice from a foster carers perspective on how services can be improved. The council has welcomed this commitment to the work programme going forward.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 Consultation with Derby City Foster Care Association regarding payment for skills model.

Other options

- 6.1 Not applicable

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. A budget increase in 2018-19 allowed fostering allowances to be up-rated to keep pace with the recommended national minimum rate.

Any increase in the shortfall of in-house placements has a direct financial effect due to the much higher placement costs in the independent sector. It is therefore essential to keep pace with market place developments regarding the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

In the event of an appeal to the IRM – full name the cost falls on the fostering service provider. The fee is £2500 for each case referred to the IRM.

Legal implications

- 8.1 The fostering function of the Council is regulated by the 1989 Children Act and the Associated Fostering Regulations, guidance and the minimum standards published in 2011.

Other significant implications

- 9.1 None.

Personnel

- 10.1 The service is managed by a Head of Service for Fostering. There are three full time fostering team managers and 16 FTE social workers who carry out the full range of statutory regulations associated with fostering activity.

The fostering team maintain close working relationships with the Keep to ensure the therapeutic needs of children and carers are met. The service is supported by one full time casework support officer post and one recruitment officer.

Equalities Impact

- 11.1 The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in relation to children being placed and for adults who apply to become foster carers. Due to the decision to scope an alternative delivery model for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers an Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 09/01/19.

Health and Safety

- 12.1 This is considered at all stages of the recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of foster carers. All the managers in the service have completed mandatory Health and Safety training. Fostering panel have a quality assurance role to ensure all fostering households meet the required national minimum standards for fostering.

Environmental Sustainability

- 13.1 None arising from this report.

Property and Asset Management

- 14.1 None arising from this report.

Risk Management

- 15.1 Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 16.1 Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through business plans and individual performance monitoring throughout the service. To continue to

recruit and increase a range of Derby City Council foster carers as identified in the marketing strategy 2017-2020. The Fostering Service supports the Council priorities of:

- Identify and meet needs to deliver improved outcomes
- Learning from and improving practice
- Sustain capacity and build capability across the city

This report has been approved by the following people:

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Background papers:		

