



Fostering Agency Report

SUMMARY

- 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 2016. The Statement of Purpose has been updated for 2018 and is attached as appendix 2.

This report covers the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018

1.2 Summary for Children and Young People

This report covers the work completed by the fostering service and explains how the fostering service recruits new foster carers by using social media, 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.

We are still working on our social media presence including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. An exciting piece of work with other local authorities has been the production of a video called 'There was a boy' which tells the story of a young boy in foster care and his achievements. This video is on the website for you to see.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To approve the Fostering Agency report and Marketing Plan

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To comply with guidance and regulations and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.
- 3.2 To increase availability and placement range of in house foster placements

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 **Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to ensure that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children**
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.
- 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. Panel is 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 adviser.

- 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 and adoption 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 and Adoption 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 17/18 was £26,000. This has reduced to £19,000 for 18/19. Key activity areas in the marketing plan for 2017/18 have been:

- Three major targeted events held in June and October 2017 and February 2018
- Re-design of Derby City Council website and increased presence on social media
- 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
- Further collaboration of local authorities across the East and West Midlands to produce a recruitment film titled There was a Boy
- Re-design of fostering allowance booklet to further promote 'Refer a Friend' scheme, for which existing foster carer receive £500
- Roadside signage displayed for 2 weeks in Feb 2018 launching 'Imagine the Possibilities' campaign. Targeted areas were Oakwood, Allestree, Pride Park and City Centre

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. Underpinning the marketing strategy will be the ongoing improvements to the quality and content of the website. Social media has been scheduled to gain the maximum exposure with regular twitter and Facebook posts going out now. The medium term plan is to have our own Facebook page for fostering; this is being developed by the Marketing Officer based in the Communications Team.

4.6.3 The financial review of our current fee payment scheme is ongoing. Consultation with our existing foster carers on the payment for skills remuneration scheme is due to take place imminently and once implemented will allow foster carers to progress up a training pathway to increase their skills and meet the needs of more challenging children.

4.7 Recruitment activity between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018

Initial Enquiries	Information Packs Sent	Initial Visits	Applications Left	Returned Forms	Approvals
178	147	52	28	20	Mainstream 7 Friends & Family 6

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 178 fostering enquiries, 61% of which were White British between ages of 30-59 years. The lower figure for enquiries reflects the different approach to marketing and the decision to attend fewer outdoor community events which attracted a higher level of enquiries but did not produce any substantial difference to conversions.
- 4.7.2 On-line enquiries and telephone enquires account for 78% of total enquiries and the service has seen a gradual increase in on-line enquiries since the website was re-launched in November 2017.
- 4.7.3 There were 3 main targeted events during the year with a total of 16 prospective fostering households taking the first step to find out more information on becoming a foster carer. This resulted in 10 initial visits (those who did not have initial visits did not want to take their enquiry further at that time). Following the initial visits 8 households were invited to make a formal application. Out of these 8 households the service received 4 completed applications, 2 households withdrew and 2 chose not to respond to the recruitment officer's tracking activity. Out of the 4 completed applications received, 2 have since withdrawn – 1 for health reasons, 1 due to lack of availability. 1 is currently being assessed. 1 is still pending due to personal circumstances.
- 4.7.4 From the 178 initial enquiries 147 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 52 initial visits were conducted within this period, 28 application forms (54%) 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 and pre-approval training process.
- 4.7.6 With regards to the 28 applications, 20 were completed and returned to the Fostering Service (71%). 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 8 households who did not return their completed application forms and 6 did not respond. 2 of the potential applicants decided it was not the right time to pursue fostering.
- 4.7.7 There were 13 approvals at fostering panel in total. Seven of the approvals were mainstream approvals and six were family and friends carers. A further two mainstream approvals were due at panel before the end of March 2018 but were delayed due to staff sickness and this resulted in the service missing their target of 15 new approvals. Both applicants were approved in May 2018.
- 4.7.8 There were a total of 10 withdrawn applications during this time period and 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 2018**
 Since 1st April 2018 the service has approved 5 new households - 2 mainstream and 3 Family and Friends carers. The first mainstream approval was for 1 child aged 0-2 years for short-term and emergency placements and the second mainstream approval was for 1 child aged 5-17 years for short-breaks and respite. The family and friends approvals provided placements for 3 looked after children.
- 4.8.1 As of 1st September 2018 there are 11 fostering assessments being undertaken. 7 of the assessments are for mainstream fostering and 4 are family and friends assessments. All 11 assessments are meeting required timescales and are on target to be completed before the end of the financial year. This would bring a total of 16 approvals for the year 18/19. The family and friends approvals will provide placements for 8 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 4 and another is for a sibling group of 2.

4.9 **De-Registrations:**

There were a total of 18 de-registrations presented at panel between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018. 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 18 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.
- 1 fostering household converted to a shared lives placement in order to provide ongoing support to a young person who met the shared lives criteria.
- 5 of the de-registrations were from family and friends carers who no longer had a child in placement
- 1 obtained a Special Guardianship Order
- 10 resignations were due to foster carers retiring from the role

4.10 **Allowances**

Fostering allowances were reviewed and approved for 2018-19 with an agreed uplift of 2.3%. The forecast increase of £41,553 can be contained within the total cost centre budget for Fostering Allowances in 2018-19.

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

Ofsted made a total of eleven recommendations in 2017, one of which was to “prioritise the recruitment and commissioning of a variety of local foster carers to provide sufficient capacity to best meet the needs of children looked after in Derby”. The council agreed to undertake a soft market test. The soft market test will establish whether there are financial benefits for the council to contract out part or all of the service via a commissioning or partnership arrangement within the voluntary or private sector.

4.11.1 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.

4.11.2 Key committee members periodically meet with fostering team managers to share social work practice issues and changes taking place in the service. This year has been a challenging year for foster carers in the face of the council's decision to undertake soft market testing regarding a future delivery model. This has led to unrest and confusion amongst carers which has created an uncertain time for the organisation. The FCA have been able to offer a space for carers to discuss their concerns with the department, although challenging meetings they have been well attended.

4.11.3 The FCA has been actively involved in the planning of support groups and hopes to develop this role more fully in the future. The FCA welcomes the review of the financial support package available to carers and is pleased that the service has made significant strides this year in addressing this. We remain available for consultation on implementing a payment for skills structure. It has been important for

the FCA to remain active in supporting the voice of Derby City Foster Carers.

- 4.11.4 During 2018/19 the aim is to further develop links with carers and source replacements for the key committee roles going into 2020. The FCA are committed to ensuring they offer the best independent support to foster carers and the department as we continue to work together to find the best outcome for our most vulnerable young people.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 Not applicable

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s)	Suanne Lim, Service Director, Childrens Integrated Services, People Services Directorate 01332 642641 suanne.lim@derby.gov.uk
For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Sally Penrose Head of Fostering and Adoption 01332 6438817 sally.penrose@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 - Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Appendix 3 – Marketing Plan

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 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-rate 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. The council agreed to undertake a feasibility exercise and commence a period of soft market testing to explore alternative models of delivering the service with potential providers.

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

- 2.1 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.

Personnel

- 3.1 The service is managed by a Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption. 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 two full time casework support officer posts and one recruitment officer.

IT

- 4.1 None arising from this report.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 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. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and increased efforts in the recruitment of short break carers has been positive. A small number of approved carers offer placements to asylum seeking young people.

Health and Safety

- 6.1 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.

Environmental Sustainability

7.1 None arising from this report

Property and Asset Management

8.1 None arising from this report

Risk Management

9.1 Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

10.1 Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through business plans and individual performance plans 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