

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**  
**Monday 13 November 2023**

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Z. Collingham.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillor Pitchley, Councillor Griffin and Nicola Curley.

**106. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**Resolved:** - That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 September 2023, were agreed as a correct record.

**107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no personal interests declared.

**108. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Minutes 111 (The Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028), 112 (The Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer Update) and 113 (The Leaving Care Action Plan Update) were exempt from the press and public. The Chair moved the following resolution:- That under Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of such Act indicated, as now amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person, including the authority holding that information).

**Resolved:** - That members of the press and public be excluded for these items.

**109. THE ONE ADOPTION SOUTH YORKSHIRE ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE**

The Head of Service for One Adoption South Yorkshire provided an update to the panel on the One Adoption South Yorkshire Annual Report and outlined the following:

- One Adoption South Yorkshire was established three years ago, and the report provided an update on the second year 2022-2023.
- The agency was split into four services, work had been completed to ensure the four services provided a consistent and cohesive service.
- It was a challenging year for the organisation, 57 adopters were recruited during this period with a target set of 90. Pre-pandemic levels were much higher and were within the target set, however it was noted that the cost-of-living crisis had an impact on the number of adopters recruited throughout this period.
- The current position was that the number of adopters had risen this year so far, with far more enquiries received in comparison to the period of 2022-2023. The level of children requiring placements had also increased.
- It was highlighted that there was a shortage of adopters nationally, this was a challenge for the organisation.
- The agency had improved the process of assessing, recruiting, approving, and matching potential adopters, this was now a faster process with children being placed immediately in most cases.

The Chair thanked the Head of Service from One Adoption South Yorkshire for the presentation and invited questions. This led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- When the agency was established as a partnership agency across South Yorkshire, it was agreed that each local authority would provide a level of funding equivalent to the amount of money they

were spending on adoption at that point in time. It was advised that the funding levels would remain until December 2025, when the current agreement would come to an end. Throughout the period of 2021-2022, an amount of £100,000 was retained to purpose the underspend, this money was used to purchase a recording system for the organisation. A proportion of the underspend, £150,000, was also retained by the agency to create a financial buffer. Any underspend at the end of December 2025 would be divided up and returned to the local authorities, this would be proportionate to the amount that each local authority provided at the start of the process. The money returned to each local authority would go back into their Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) budget and it would be the service's decision on how to spend the returned money.

- In relation to the enquiry stage, there was a high level of adopters that decided not to progress their application further after making initial enquiries and before the registration stage. To mitigate this, the Senior Management Team (SMT) within the agency had suggested that the agency arrange for adopters to engage with potential adopters, at the earliest stage possible. This would provide an opportunity for potential adopters to find out more from adopters with lived experience at an early stage.
- The data within the report showed that there was a higher level of adopters leaving the agency, this was because of the cost-of-living crisis.
- The judiciary were very wary in relation to adoption and often provided time limits to local authorities. An example was provided of a judge that decided if the child in question was not adopted within six months, they should remain in long-term fostering. It was advised that there was often a misconception in the judiciary that children were unable to have contact with their birth family if they were adopted. This often influenced the decision of judges, to choose the option of long-term fostering rather than adoption. The

agency was working with the judiciary to ensure there was a better understanding of contact with birth families.

- It was advised there were rare occasions where children were returned after an Early Permanence Placement (EPP) had been agreed. To mitigate this, the agency was working with early placements to ensure there was a suitable level of resilience.
- In relation to the A2 Indicator within the report, it was advised that the Service Manager for One Adoption South Yorkshire would meet with the Service Manager for Fostering Residential, to complete a lesson learned approach to ensure any potential improvements were identified.
- It was advised that each local authority area in South Yorkshire were very similar statistically, with all four local authorities recruiting a similar number of adopters and requiring a similar number of placements.
- It would be possible to include the breakdown of ethnicities for the dataset provided within the report.

#### **110. THE FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023 UPDATE**

The Service Manager for Fostering Residential provided an update to the panel on the Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023 and outlined the following:

- The report provided a summary of the strategy in place during the timescale the report covered. During this time the service was struggling to recruit foster carers, as a result the service developed ideas to attract more foster carers. It was advised that the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis had impacted the number of foster carers recruited.
- The service had collated feedback during this period from foster carers on their experiences, to identify potential areas for improvement.
- The service had identified that there was a requirement to return to

place-based marketing and some good examples were provided of how new foster carers were recruited through events such as the Rotherham Show.

- There had been an increase in fees and allowances for foster carers during this period, which had improved the competitiveness of the local authority within the market, in relation to the recruitment and retention offer.
- There had been a return of face-to-face events, an example was provided of the foster carer's celebration event. There had also been an increase in support groups for foster carers, due to an increase in isolation during the pandemic. It was recognised that buddying schemes were very important for potential foster carers.
- It was advised that the Pathways to Care Budget was unique to Rotherham and was available for a variety of purposes. An example was provided of how room adaptations could be completed for potential or existing foster carers, to create further provision for fostering.
- The number of foster carers that were approved during this period was higher than the previous year, with recruitment also further increasing this year to date.
- There were pledges provided by directorates on what they could assist with, in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers, as a result there had been more advertising.
- There had been a decrease during this period of people who downloaded the information guide on fostering and then continued to the enquiry stage. However, it was noted that this number was still at a good level compared to other local authorities.
- There had been a focus on the retention of foster carers during this period, this had resulted in a decrease in de-registrations of foster carers. In relation to the data regarding the length of time people fostered before de-registering from the service, there was 36% of people who fostered for two years or less before de-registering. The data captured on de-registrations had been used to inform the

Retention Strategy.

- A high-level overview was provided on the number of children in care and placement stability, disruption, and planned endings. It was evident during this period that a strong focus was required on placement stability and disruption. It was noted that the service was now in a strong position to work towards stabilising placements. The reasons for unplanned endings were discussed, it was advised that the challenging behaviours of young people, the wellbeing of foster carers and matching were identified reasons. These areas of focus would be strengthened within the Fostering Plan.
- There was a report produced by the Fostering Panel, which provided an insight into the good quality of work the Panel were seeing, it was evident that the quality of assessments was improving and fostering assessments were very strong.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager for Fostering Residential for the presentation and invited questions. This led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- A comprehensive wellbeing offer had been developed which included a drop-in session for foster carers where they could check-in in a safe environment. The wellbeing offer was in its infancy and would be further developed in due course.
- There had been an increase in Independent Fostering Agency transfers.

#### **111. THE FOSTERING ROTHERHAM PLAN 2023-2028**

The Chair advised that as the item contained restricted information and as resolved in Minute 108, that the Panel would go into private session for the consideration of this item.

The Head of Service for Looked After Children provided an update to the panel on the Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028, this outlined the

following:

- An overview of recruitment, retention, and improvement work.
- An overview of the vision aims and objectives of the service.
- The local context.
- The local authority's ambition for fostering.
- The action plan relating to Fostering Rotherham would be refreshed on an annual basis.
- Future priorities were discussed which would ensure continuously improvement for the service and the best offer for children in care and foster carers.

#### **112. THE ROTHERHAM CARE LEAVERS LOCAL OFFER UPDATE**

The Chair advised that as the item contained restricted information and as resolved in Minute 108, that the Panel would go into private session for the consideration of this item.

The Head of Service for Looked After Children provided an update to the panel on the Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer and outlined the following:

- A high-level overview of the Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer.

#### **113. THE LEAVING CARE ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Chair advised that as the item contained restricted information and as resolved in Minute 108, that the Panel would go into private session for the consideration of this item.

The Head of Service for Looked After Children provided an update to the panel on the Leaving Care Action Plan and outlined the following:

- The action plan focused on the priorities of the Leaving Care Service, this included strengthening relationships, training and

development and the local offer in relation to housing options.

**114. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to consider.

**115. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:** - That the next meeting be held on 12 December 2023, commencing at 4.00 p.m. to be held in the Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.