

Summary Sheet

Council Report

Title: Fostering Service Annual Report

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Thomas

Report Author(s)

Paul Dempsey

Ward(s) Affected

All Wards are affected

Executive Summary

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council needs the fostering service to recruit more foster carers to “build on” the increases over the last 4 years (from 132 to 167 carers), particularly to care for sibling groups and older children (10+ years); whilst strengthening support to enable children to remain at home or with extended family members (wherever possible), our strategy has included a new “be a local hero” recruitment campaign across the borough; this is backed by Cllr Gordon Watson, the Corporate Parenting Panel and elected members (and parish councillors) in key “target areas” (Swinton/Kilhurst, Thurcroft, North Anston and Herringthorpe/Stag).

There have been positive achievements: in the placement stability of children and young people: the increase of children placed with in-house foster carers: the increased number of young people “staying put” with their foster carers post-18 years of age: the increase of carer support groups: the increase in fostering celebration events: the uptake of training by foster carers.

Recommendations:

- An increase in the number of foster carers, particularly to care for sibling groups and older children (10+ years)
- Implementation of the new recruitment campaign and strategy
- Continue to support children at home or with extended family members
- Further development and implementation of the “Empower and Protect Programme” (the CSE Innovation scheme across South Yorkshire)
- Further increase the number of children in permanent homes by utilising the newly-established Permanence Fostering worker.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1: Fostering Service Annual Report to the Fostering Panel 2014-15

Appendix 2: Fostering Service 6-month Update Report to the Fostering Panel (April-September 2015)

Background Papers

Appendix 1: Fostering Service Annual Report to the Fostering Panel 2014-15

Appendix 2: Fostering Service 6-month Update Report to the Fostering Panel (April-September 2015)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Appendices 1 and 2 reports have been considered by the Local Authority Fostering Panel

No other committee or panel consideration proposed

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Fostering Service Annual Report

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Corporate Parenting Panel note the contents of the report
- 1.2 That Corporate Parenting Panel note the key role that foster carers play in caring for our most vulnerable children and young people
- 1.3 That Corporate Parenting Panel members promote the role of fostering and foster carers in their everyday work in the borough and 'champion' foster carers as our "local (super) heroes".

2. Background

- 2.1 The Local Authority in Rotherham operates a fostering service to care for our looked after children. The service provides family based care for children who can no longer live with their parents or extended families. Some children stay in foster carer for a short period of time and others stay for many years until they reach adulthood. This report advises Corporate Parenting Panel members of the key business carried out by the Fostering Service in 2014/15 and business in the first 6 months of 2015/16.

3. Key Issues

2014-15

- 3.1 RMBC's independent Foster Panel considered the following items: Skills to Foster Applications: "Connected Carers" (family & friends) Applications: First Reviews of foster carers: Reviews following allegations/complaints against foster carers: Child and Family Permanence (long-term) Matching: Changes in terms of approval of foster carers
- 3.2 Performance and Development Reviews were completed on all Panel members with the exception of the newly-appointed Panel Chair (February 2015); this is being scheduled

3.3 There were 22 Foster Panels convened. 137 agenda items were discussed, an average of 6.2 items per Panel. The table below categorises these items:

Agenda Item	Statistics
Skills to Foster Assessment	21
Regulation 24 (connected carer) Assessment	2
1st Carer Review	27
Change of Category	26
De-registration	29
Permanent (Long-term) Matching (In-house)	12
Permanent (Long-term) Matching (IFA)	10
Allegations Report	12
Total	137

3.4 Of particular concern during the year was a reduction in fostering enquiries; this particularly coincided with the publication of the Jay Report and subsequent negative media attention over a prolonged period of time. The outcome was a net loss of 11 fostering households; there were 18 approvals and 29 de-registrations. However, there was a 12% “conversion rate” (from 147 enquiries, there were 18 approvals) – the national average conversion rate was 11%

3.5 At the end of the year, there were 167 fostering households

3.6 There was an increase in the number of children being looked after by in-house foster carers: 182 children (45% of all looked after children) compared with 163 children the previous year (41% of all looked after children)

3.7 There was a significant improvement regarding permanent foster placement stability from 68.8% (2014) to 71.9% (2015); this performance was in the top quartile for local authorities nationally

3.8 All 8 young people in foster care (who became 18 years of age during the year) remained with their foster carers in a “staying put” arrangement

3.9 Two additional foster carer support groups were set up, thus, 4 groups in total plus a carers’ children group; the groups are take place on different days of the week, at different times of the day across the borough, to provide carers with choices and options

- 3.10 Regarding training and development, 286 individual foster carers accessed 1013 training courses; the most popular were the online course “CSE – Keep Them Safe (96 foster carers) and the 1st Aid training course (67 foster carers)
- 3.11 There were a number of fostering celebrations: annual foster carer celebration and Halloween Party for carers and children (both November 2014); Christmas Party (December 2014); foster carer long service awards hosted by the Mayor (February 2015); Easter Party (March 2015); all of the celebration events were extremely appreciated by the foster carers and the children.

2015 (up to September)

- 3.12 There have been 11 Foster Panel convened; 47 items have been discussed, an average of 4.3 items per Panel; the reduction is due, in part, to a modification of Panel business – changes to carers’ terms of approval are no longer considered by the Panel but by the Agency Decision Maker; the table below categorises these items:

Agenda Item	Statistics
Skills to Foster Assessment	6
Regulation 24 (connected carer) Assessment	2
1st Carer Review	11
Change of Category	2
De-registration/Resignations	10
Long-term Matching (In-house)	9
Long-term Matching (IFA)	5
Allegations Report	2
Total	47

- 3.13 A quality assurance audit of each item presented to the Panel has been implemented (from June 2015) in 2 areas of work: the report provided by the worker(s); the presentation by the worker(s); this has included a “score” as follows:
- Score of 1 = Inadequate – requires significant improvement
 - Score of 2 = Inadequate – requires moderate improvement
 - Score of 3 = Good – requires minor improvement
 - Score of 4 = Very good – high-level practice
 - Score of 5 = Outstanding – best practice

The overall “average” score of reports provided to the Panel is 3.2 (“good”); the overall “average” score of the presentations at the Panel by social workers is 3.6 (“good”); it is worthy of note that 15 of the 22 presentations to the Panel were scored as 4 (“very good – high level practice”) the fostering social workers, fostering managers and Foster Panel are working together to improve these further via constructive feedback at all stages to the social workers (highlighting quality work and areas of development)

- 3.14 There have been 6 approvals and 3 de-registrations, thus 170 fostering households; however, there have been 95 enquiries (14 more than the corresponding period in the previous year); currently, there are 21 fostering applications being assessed
- 3.15 There has been an increase in the number of children being looked after by in-house foster carers during the 6 months to September: 200 children (an increase of 18 children) of 414, thus 48% of all looked after children, an increase of 3%; it is worthy of note that there were 163 such children in the previous year (41% of all looked after children)
- 3.16 There continues to be a significant improvement regarding permanence (long-term) foster placement stability; this has again increased in the last 6 months to 77.4% (from 68.8% in 2013-14 to 71.9% in 2014-15). This performance remains in the top quartile for local authorities nationally
- 3.17 There are currently 13 young people who have remained with their foster carers after their 18th birthday (Staying Put arrangements) with plans for a further 11 to do so in the coming months
- 3.18 Regarding training and development, 238 individual foster carers have, so far, accessed 670 training courses; the most popular are e-PEP training (80 carers), e-Safety training (25 carers), the online course “CSE – Keep Them Safe” (a further 21 carers, an overall total of 117 foster carers)
- 3.19 The service needs more foster carers to “build on” the increases over the last 4 years (from 132 to 167 foster carers), particularly to care for sibling groups and older children (10+ years); to achieve this, the strategy includes: supporting children to remain at home or with extended family members (wherever possible): a pro-active and innovative recruitment campaign with the theme of foster carers being “local heroes” (62% of people consider foster carers to be heroes): development and implementation of the CSE Innovation scheme across South Yorkshire, the “Empower & Protect Programme”: utilising the newly-established Permanence Fostering worker (to secure permanent homes in a timely fashion for all children who need them): utilising the approved policy for funding extensions for foster carers (to increase their capacity to care for children, e.g. sibling groups).

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 none

5. Consultation

- 5.1 We have consulted extensively with our foster carers via the monthly marketing group and support groups. The new recruitment campaign was

undertaken with the assistance of our foster carers; indeed, they have been so committed to improving our service that they themselves (and their own children) were the “actors” in the videos produced and “models” for the complementary publicity materials (e.g. banners, posters).

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 Not applicable

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 Under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989, there is a “sufficiency duty” for local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practical, sufficient accommodation for looked after children in their local authority area in order to stay at the same school or near to other family where contact can easily take place. In addition, it makes good economic sense to have a sufficient range of placements to meet the needs of looked after children, as not having enough placements has resulted in placing children in higher cost placements which meet their needs less well than local “value for money” family placements.

8. Legal Implications

none

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1 There has been a recent increase in staffing within the fostering service with the appointment of a “permanence social worker” whose primary role is to drive forward the permanent placements of looked after children (e.g. permanent, long-term foster care, Special Guardianship orders)

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

10.1 It is vital that we provide high quality, local foster care for our looked after children; these are the most vulnerable children and young people in our community. By increasing the numbers of foster carers, we will be able to offer a greater choice of “placement” and improved matching between child and carer, enable children to remain close to their family and continue their education in their own school

11. Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1 Good quality, local foster care (that promotes family contact and maintains local relationships) has a positive outcome for children and young people. This is particularly in accordance with the Human Rights Act, most notably the Right to a Private and Family Life (Article 8)

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1 The new “local hero” recruitment campaign, developed and constructed by the Communications team in conjunction with the fostering service and foster carers, has been greatly supported and assisted by elected members; the campaign was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 22nd September 2015 and, on Wednesday 14th October 2015, Cllr Gordon Watson chaired a successful meeting of elected members, parish councillors and other interested parties, particularly in the “targeted areas” of Thurgroft, Swinton/Kilhurst, North Anston and Herringthorpe/Stag. This meeting provided focussed detail on enabling us to better interact with those areas.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 There are 2 key risks associated with the fostering service; the first is that we do not enough foster carers to meet the needs of our looked after children, hence the need for the new recruitment campaign as part of our sufficiency strategy; the second risk is that services to looked after children, including the fostering service, is a key element of the inspection by Ofsted.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Approvals Obtained from:-

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services:- Named officer

Director of Legal Services:- Named officer

Head of Procurement (if appropriate):-

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