

Summary Sheet

Council Report

Title

Local Hero Fostering Recruitment Campaign

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

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Jean Imray

Report Author(s)

Darren Johnson

Ward(s) Affected

All Wards Affected

Summary

Recommendations

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

To endorse Local Hero Campaign and workstream activities for improving numbers of approved carers

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Title (Main Report)

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel fully endorses and support the Local Hero Fostering & Recruitment Campaign and approach outlined in report.

2. Background

2.1 On 11th November 2015, the Local Hero Campaign was successfully launched by Cllr Gordon Watson to support RMBC new fostering campaign strategy which was developed in response to:

- a gradual decline/reduction in fostering enquiries coinciding with the publication of the Jay Report
- net loss in fostering households believed at least in part to be caused by subsequent negative media attention over prolonged period
- the need to regionally re-position RMBC as the agency of choice when considering a career in fostering
- the need to identify creative solutions for promoting fostering and increasing numbers of new enquiries and approved carers

Since launch we have improved our online & offline processes, applying a variety of marketing methods to promote the campaign and target prospective foster carers in Rotherham and across neighbouring borough's. A Marketing & Recruitment Steering Group has now been established; the group meets on a monthly basis to oversee and co-ordinate the campaign and includes representation from our communication team. Main focus for the group during next six months is to:

- further generate interest/momentum on the back of November launch
- increase brand awareness through the Local Hero Campaign
- improve public perception regarding fostering in Rotherham
- provide effective co-ordination/delivery of online & offline activities
- increase our conversion rate from enquiries to approval

3. Key Issues

3.1 Offline Activities & Super Output Areas

We have increased our promotional work in key areas identified as prime localities for targeted recruitment e.g. Thurcroft, Swinton, North Anston & Herringthorpe. Posters and leaflets have been distributed to Local Parishes, Schools, GP Surgeries, Libraries, Community/Leisure Centres; and the Local Hero campaign promoted in parish newsletters. An event calendar has been set up to enable us to track and engage in upcoming events throughout the year e.g. Swinton FC, Big Local, LGBT Rotherham, Rotherham Faith Leaders Council, and the Rotherham Town Hall Open Day.

Monthly Drop-ins have been organised to facilitate face to face discussions with members of the public interested in becoming foster carers. The Marketing & Recruitment Steering Group are planning a mini-campaign called “Fostering on The Move” capitalizing on the Local Hero marketing platform using a Routemaster Bus to promote Rotherham Fostering and engage local communities across the super-output areas. Foster carers have volunteered their time to support fostering across the four wards.

In addition to the local campaign work, we will be advertising fostering recruitment on 252,000 Pay & Display Parking Tickets and 109,000 Local Hero leaflets will be distributed with the next Annual Council Tax mail out. We have also secured bus shelter poster advertising in three of the super output areas.

The mini campaign initiatives and local engagement will be supported through our online activities e.g. council website, facebook/twitter social media platforms and through press & radio coverage.

Online Activities

The Steering Group looked at ways in which to improving online presence & increase public awareness. The marketing techniques identified as providing the most effective method for promoting our campaign were:

- HTML Banners/Sponsored Links
- Online Subscribers & Newsletters
- Google Re-targeting/Pay Per Click
- Social Media Platforms – Twitter/Facebook
- Radio/Local Press
- Electronic Bill Boards

HTML Publicity Banners

HTML banners have been created to enable key partners to upload our Local Hero logo on business websites. There has been some take up and utilization of online promotional banners on key sites e.g. Rother FM, Rotherham Advertiser, Unison and Swinton AFC. We will continue to target partner agencies and increase take up of banners on multiple sites.

Online Subscribers & Newsletter

We currently have 750 subscribers via council website who have at some point browsed our Local Hero micro site or have linked onto the main RMBC fostering site. Subscribers have since received further emails with promotional/marketing materials and the Steering Group have created an electronic newsletter & blog to engage subscribers and those interested in becoming carers.

Google Pay Per Click & Re-Targeting

This method involves running banner ads which specifically targets members of the public who previously visited our Local Hero or main council website. Visitors who leave these sites will then see Rotherham Local Hero banner ads elsewhere as a “pop up” on their smartphone, laptop or desktop computer when initiating alternative web searches. We are currently trialling this method and a review will be undertaken later in the year to determine its success in increasing no’s of carers and whether we continue this approach as part of our recruitment strategy.

Social Media Platforms

Both twitter, youtube and facebook accounts are maintained and kept updated by the Adoption & Fostering Marketing Officer. It is a powerful tool for promoting campaign messages and influencing/directing public interests towards our corporate website and marketing/recruitment events. The social media work informs & drives key activities set within the annual event calendar e.g drop-ins, open days, gala’s and fostering on the move.

Radio & Local Press

We currently have rolling advertising on Rother FM publicising the Local Hero Campaign. We have weekly adverts in the local press for supporting online and offline recruitment.

Electronic Billboards

We have commissioned eight weeks advertising space on the electronic billboard at Meadowhall Shopping Centre commencing March 2016. This is a prime location with significant passing trade enabling us to target prospective foster carers at peak shopping hours.

Impact & Outcomes: November 2015 – January 2016

Since launching the Fostering Hero Campaign in November 2015 the fostering recruitment team have received 60 enquiries. There were previously 40 enquiries received during the corresponding 2014/15 period.

Sources of Information	Number of enquiries
Rotherham Hero website	12
RMBC website	9
Rotherham Advertiser/Dearne Valley Weekender and Rotherham Record	9
Google search	8
Word of mouth	8
Drop in sessions held at Riverside House	5
Facebook	2
Rother FM radio	1
Big Local community event	1
Rotherham Show	1
Previous enquiries	6
The actual making of the 60 enquiries:	
Direct contact	25
RMBC website enquiry form	18
Rotherham Hero website enquiry form	17

In addition, out of the 60 enquiries, 25 have come via direct contact (telephone or information events), 18 came through completing RMBC on-line enquiry forms and 17 via the Fostering Heroes site. So far 58% of all enquiries were generated online during this period.

The “Making of a Hero” video has had 637 views on YouTube and over 700 people, have logged onto the www.rotherhamhero.co.uk website, to register for our monthly newsletter.

The period since the launch includes the Christmas and New Year holiday period and this is a notoriously slow time of year for recruitment however it is clear that the efforts made thus far must be further enhanced and the momentum then maintained.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 The recent increase in LAC population places additional pressures on limited resources. In the short term we will need to be both creative and resourceful in maximising our in-house provision as we continue to identify appropriate placement options for looked after children. The campaign is critical in enabling us to deliver against the sufficiency strategy and increase the numbers of available foster placements to cope with supply and demand.

The recruitment of foster carers is not just about numbers of new carers , it's also about ensuring we have sufficient numbers to replace households/ placements lost sometimes for positive reasons e.g. transition to staying put arrangement, conversion from short to long term placement, EPP/foster to adopt, retirement or in some cases negative reasons e.g. de-registration. We are currently projecting a loss of 13 placements at year end. Therefore consideration needs to be given concerning stretched targets to reflect both target set within the sufficiency plan and placements required to replace those lost in 2015/16.

Both IFA's and neighbouring authorities are facing recruitment challenges and seeking ways to increase their fostering pool. Anecdotally IFAs are finding Rotherham the most challenging borough in the region to recruit within. In order for RMBC to remain competitive, attract new carers away from our competitors and become the agency of choice, we are looking to review and recommend increases to current fostering rates/allowance to enable us to further develop the pool and significantly increase numbers of specialist placements for children with complex needs.

5. Consultation

5.1 There is ongoing dialogue/consultation with the Communication Team who provide technical expertise and input for informing direction of the campaign e.g. improving our impact via social media platform and work on twitter/facebook accounts.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 There is a 3 year timetable linked to the sufficiency plan e.g. 20 placements per annum.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 The original marketing & recruitment strategy outlined budget/expenditure costs for meeting targets set within the sufficiency plan. The introduction of stretched targets for carer recruitment and the review of fostering allowances will have future implications in terms of fostering budget. Detailed work is currently being undertaken with the finance team to inform costings and business case with the intention of managing future spend within agreed budget allocation.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 None

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1 None

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

10.1 The marketing & recruitment campaign has significant implications in terms of our ability to ensure those recruited are able to meet the needs of Rotherham's children and successfully address requirements set out within the sufficiency plan for supporting children close to their local communities.

11. Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1 None

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1 The Local Hero campaign will require ongoing high level engagement from the Communication Team to support this work and help us deliver against agreed targets.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 RMBC will have to counter any future negative publicity in coming years impacting on number of enquiries and new approvals. The Local Hero Campaign will need to be responsive and creative in applying online & offline marketing solutions for overcoming potential barriers to recruitment.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Darren Johnson, Service Manager, CYPS, Adoption & Fostering

Approvals Obtained from:-

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services:- Lead/Joanne Robertson (Finance) & Luke Ricketts (HR)

Director of Legal Services:- Lead/Robin Williams (Childcare Solicitor)

Head of Procurement (if appropriate):- N/A

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