

## Summary Sheet

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting** Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

**Report Title** The Strategic Commissioning Review of 'In-House' Foster Care.

**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)** Ian Walker – Head of Service

**Ward(s) Affected** All

## Summary

- 1.1 This report should be considered alongside and in conjunction with the LAC Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2017-20. The findings in this Review demonstrate the Service is going some way towards a successful implementation of the Strategy but that there is a risk of a lack of capacity and capability within the in-house fostering service to deliver against the increased demand for placements and the improved offer to Foster Carers.
- 1.2 The findings highlight key issues around organisation, support and a culture of performance and learning, all of which are directly impeding the Service's ability to operate effectively in the market and improve the quality of practice.
- 1.3 There is a continued lack of a joined up approach across the In-House and external market. This means there is a lack of clarity in relation to the respective functions and focus which subsequently fails to maximise quality of provision/ optimum matching of placements.
- 1.4 Detailed recommendations are included in the Review which are aimed at ensuring that the Fostering Service can deliver to the intentions set out in the LAC Sufficiency Strategy investments and the CYPS Medium Term Financial Sustainability Plan.

## Recommendations

The recommendation is that CPP considers and approves this report and agree its presentation to the Fostering Panel for information and consideration. Once the approval process has been completed a full action plan will be developed, the implementation of which will be overseen by a newly established Foster Care Service Improvement Group in order to accelerate pace and grip.

**List of Appendices Included**

The Strategic Review is included as an Appendix to this report

**Background Papers**

None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

N/a.

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **Insert Title of Report here**

### **1. Recommendations**

1.1 The recommendation is that CPP considers and approves this report and agree its presentation to the Fostering Panel for information and consideration. Once the approval process has been completed a full action plan will be developed, the implementation of which will be overseen by a newly established Foster Care Service Improvement Group in order to accelerate pace and grip.

### **2. Background**

2.1 Since the completion of this report the numbers of looked after children (LAC) have continued to rise from the 488 as at the end of December to 508 as at the end of May 2017. As of the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 there were only 433 LAC and despite the marked improvements achieved in the recruitment, retention and efficient utilisation of in-house foster carers this trend will continue to place increasing pressure on the Sufficiency Plan.

2.2 The Strategic Commissioning Review was developed in recognition of these significant risks and the financial pressures that they will present. It was one of the recommendations of this Review that the report should be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel and to the Foster Panel in order to evidence governance of the service and of the Plan. This proposal was endorsed by the Foster Care Service Improvement Group meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> April.

### **3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 There is increasing evidence to indicate that the recruitment of in-house foster carers within Rotherham is an emerging strength:-
- In 2015/16 only 13 new foster carer families were recruited but in 2016/17 this had increased to 22 approvals arising from 191 enquiries albeit at a conversion rate of only 12%.
  - By undertaking more targeted initial visits and by a more forensic analysis of 'leakage points' in the Fostering Performance Clinic, plans are being formulated to increase the conversion rate to 15% which should increase the number of approvals by c 5 placements p.a.
  - In 2017/18 there have been 26 enquiries over the course of Fostering Fortnight alone. There are already 10 prospective approvals booked onto Foster Panel between now and October with another 3 also likely to be booked onto panel for consideration for approval making a total of 13 new foster families (26 additional foster families on full year projection). Thus, it is looking likely that last year's performance will be at least matched and by far exceed the original target set of a net increase of 15 foster placements per year.
  - As of the 9th June there were 203 children placed in in-house foster placements including short-breaks placements with a further 13 children in temporarily approved placements (Reg 24 Family and Friends Placements).

This number of 216 in-house foster placements is an all-time high within Rotherham.

- As of the 1<sup>st</sup> May there were 265 children in in-house placements overall – up from only 219 as of the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016.
- 85% of LAC are living in family based placements.

3.2 In addition to this there are a number of initiatives being progressed to improve foster care recruitment and therefore achieve the objectives set out in the Sufficiency Plan:-

- Recruitment of a full time Recruitment & Marketing lead (currently being advertised) to increase the visibility of Fostering in Rotherham on social media.
- A more targeted marketing campaign to address specific shortfalls in placement provision including for adolescents, large sibling groups and young people described as having 'challenging behaviour'.
- A business case to recruit a Virtual Assessment Team to supplement the permanent assessment team and to minimise any delays in the approval process. This is especially significant given the success of the work undertaken to raise the awareness in the LAC and Locality Social Work teams regarding Reg 24 Placements which was an identified issue of concern in the previous full Ofsted Inspection. The significant increase in Reg 24 Assessment referrals is likely to have an impact on the Fostering team's capacity to undertake 'mainstream' fostering assessments.
- A business case to introduce 'Refer a Fostering Friend' across RMBC whereby employees will be financial remunerated on the successful recruitment and approval of a foster carer that was referred into the service.
- Introduction of the Mockingbird Family Based Model of Fostering which has been approved and will be rolled out in 2017/18.
- Amendments to Terms and conditions of RMBC employees who foster who are interested in fostering to enable them paid time off from work to attend at fostering relevant events, such as training, reviews and panel.

3.3 However, the Commissioning Review also identifies a number of risks and threats to the Sufficiency Plan including:-

- A lack of clear promotion of the 'foster care offer' although this should be addressed by the appointment to the vacant marketing post.
- A lack of appropriate Business Support with the provision proposed in the most recent Business Support Review reducing even further from that set out in the Commissioning Review from two dedicated admin workers and one Business Support Manager to 1 Full Time Equivalent at Grade D.
- Greater scope for a closer working relationship with the Independent Fostering Agencies.
- The need to develop a learning culture in the service.
- A shortfall in analysis as to what conditions contribute to good outcomes being achieved by certain placements and not in others.

- Developments needed in the provision of Team Around the Placement Meetings with greater degrees of co-operation and co-working between the children's' social worker, the supervising social worker and the foster carer.
- The need for Liquid Logic to be developed to facilitate a more performance orientated culture within the service. Until very recently the Fostering Service have not been able to accurately report even the number of in-house foster placements but they have been tasked to performance manage this as well as:-
  - Number. of IFA placements.
  - Number of dormant/unused placements and plans to make them 'live'.
  - Supervisory social work visits.
  - Unannounced visits.
  - Foster carer reviews presented to Panel within a two year cycle.
  - Recruitment process map identifying key drop-out points.
  - Private Fostering placements
  - Reg 24 placements.

These will be managed via an in-service data-base pending the development of Liquid Logic.

- Better co-working of the Team Around the Child between the child's social worker, the supervising social worker and the foster carer.
- Developing a learning culture from unplanned placement disruptions.
- A more forensic analysis of outcomes by placement type both internal and IFA.

3.4 As stated above these developments will be managed via the Foster Care Service Improvement Group.

#### **4. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 4.1 There are no options being proposed at this stage and CPP is recommended to adopt the recommendations contained in this report and the Strategic Commissioning Review.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The Strategic Commissioning Review underwent full consultation with the Fostering Team, the Foster Carer network, the LAC Service and a variety of partner agencies.

#### **6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 6.1 The Strategic Commissioning Review is to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and Ian Walker, Head of Service will be responsible for its implementation.

## **7. Financial and Procurement Implications**

- 7.1 There are significant financial implications which are apparent from the information contained in the review of the in-house fostering service.
- 7.2 The additional investment approved by Cabinet in September 2016 has proven successful in retaining existing foster carers, attracting new foster families and meeting the target net increase of 15 places per year in 2017/18 set out in the Children's Services Sustainability Strategy approved by Council in December 2016.
- 7.3 The net increase of 15 in-house placements was supposed to enable step-down for children in less suitable and more expensive settings, namely out of authority residential and independent foster agencies. The transfer of children into Rotherham's in-house provision had significant implications regarding cashable savings which were expected to be in excess of £1m.
- 7.4 However due to the continued growth in the number of looked after children, additional local authority fostering placements have not been used as originally planned and instead have been required for new children entering care.
- 7.5 If children placed within in-house fostering are new entrants, rather than existing children in care, the savings proposed and built into the 2017/18 budget will not materialise; and there will be the budget pressure associated with additional demand. However successful recruitment of new foster carers will mean that there is more low cost provision to manage the demand which would otherwise automatically default to placement in IFA or residential provision.
- 7.6 The monitoring of progress and accurate analysis during the year will be essential through the new Foster Care Service Improvement Group which will need to report regularly to the Business Savings Delivery Group and provide a detailed breakdown regarding the potential pressures highlighted above.

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

## **9. Human Resources Implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct HR Implications applicable at this moment in time, however I would comment that any structural changes as a result of this will need to be done with full staff consultation.

## **10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 10.1 Strengthening the fostering recruitment process should enable more of our looked after children to be placed within family based setting where they are more likely to achieve positive outcomes. As a result the implications arising from this report are wholly positive ones.

## **11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications**

11.1 By improving the outcomes for looked after children their Human Rights and equal opportunities will be promoted.

## **12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates**

12.1 None noted.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

13.1 There is a significant financial and reputational risk

## **14. Accountable Officer(s)**

14.1 Ian Walker, Head of Service.

Approvals Obtained from:-

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Mark Chambers	12/6/17
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Neil Concannon	20/6/17
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	N/a	
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Rebecca Boyle	12/6/17

**Report Author:** *Ian Walker, Head of Service*

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