

## Summary Sheet

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Report Title** Muslim Foster Carer Project

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?** No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report** Jon Stonehouse

**Report Author(s)** Ian Walker, Head of Service

**Ward(s) Affected** All

**Summary** As at the start of 2019 there were 47 Looked After Children (LAC) of Muslim faith but at the same time there were only 4 Muslim foster carers. Whilst all foster carers receive cultural awareness training this shortfall presents a risk that not all of the religious, identity and cultural needs of these young people will be met.

Recognising these risks the LAC Service has established a Muslim Foster Carer Working Party that includes some of our existing Muslim foster carers, Councillor Alam and the Specialist Community Engagement Officer from South Yorkshire Police.

However, since commencing this project it has become apparent that there is some ongoing impact arising from a history of less than positive partnership working between RMBC and the local Muslim community. Due to this, the progress and impact achieved by the Working Party thus far has been limited. As a result it was considered to be appropriate to develop a more community led project to run in conjunction with the Working Party and a partnership is currently being developed with the Rotherham Muslim Community Forum to support this work. They in turn have engaged with the Mercy Mission who have a proven track record of recruiting Muslim Foster Carers for a number of local authorities including Bradford, Hackney and Blackburn.

This report will set out the rationale for the funding required to support this project and detail the other work being undertaken to ensure the religious and identity needs of this particular cohort of looked after children are better met.

**Recommendations** CPP is recommended to note the contents of this report and to endorse the proposed financial commitment required to support the recruitment of more Muslim foster carers within Rotherham.

**List of Appendices Included** Memorandum of Understanding between RMBC and the Mercy Mission UK

**Background Papers** None

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel** No

**Council Approval Required** No

**Exempt from the Press and Public** No

## **The Muslim Foster Carer Project**

### **1. Recommendations**

1.1 CPP is recommended to note the contents of this report and to endorse the proposed financial commitment required to support the recruitment of more Muslim foster carers.

### **2. Background**

2.1 As at the start of 2019 there were 47 looked after children (LAC) but only 4 Muslim foster carers. This clearly presents some risk that not all of the religious, cultural and identity needs of these children will be fully met. The LAC Service within CYPS has been working to establish a partnership with the Rotherham Muslim Community Forum and the Mercy Mission UK to increase the number of Muslim foster carers within Rotherham.

2.2 This proposal will also support the Demand Management Strategy target of recruiting an additional 15 foster carers net over the course of 2019.

### **3. Key Issues**

3.1 One of our care leavers and member of the LAC Council expressed some regret that since becoming looked after she had not had the opportunity to celebrate Eid in a full and appropriate way. As a result over the course of the most recent Eid in August she was supported to visit an identified 'host' family where all of the religious and cultural rituals were observed. She subsequently stated that this was the best Eid she could remember and also stated that this opportunity should be made available for all LAC of the Muslim faith. Out of this experience grew the Muslim Foster Care Project which has three broad aims:-

- To develop closer links with the local Muslim community in order that all LAC of the Muslim faith who express a desire can be matched with a host family in order for them to be able to fully celebrate the next Eid in August 2019.
- In conjunction with this it is planned to run a marketing campaign targeted specifically at the local Muslim community to recruit foster carers. It is hoped that by offering a hosting service some Muslim families may gain a greater understanding of the fostering role and progress to becoming foster carers.
- To support the Demand Management Strategy.

3.2 There are two broad strands to this project. There is a Muslim Foster Carer Workshop which involves representatives from the Fostering Service, existing Muslim foster carers, Councillor Alam and the Specialist Community Engagement Officer from South Yorkshire Police. In addition to this the LAC Service has engaged with the Rotherham Muslim Community Forum (RMFC) in order to:-

- Raise awareness of issues through workshops and events, to educate Muslim families on the need to get involved in fostering, building interest. Having a

local trusted organization promoting and engaging with the local Muslim communities will enable greater uptake.

- Overcome any legacy barriers of mistrust and disengagement of the local authority that exists within the Muslim community through effective engagement with persons of influence and local active groups including Apna Haq (Domestic abuse charity), Islam Rotherham and the Rotherham Council of Mosques and Tasibeeh – a charitable organisation that supports socially isolated women from a BME background.
- Assist potential foster carers identified by the RMFC by providing support and encouragement throughout the processes in order to facilitate the transition from potential to actual foster carers.
- Provide support, advice and information to the Fostering Service to increase the knowledge and awareness of Muslim communities in Rotherham such as a better understanding of the local demographics and cultural and religious factors around fostering as well as highlighting the short-falls in the current marketing strategy and strengthening the messages which are deemed viable.
- Liaise and develop a close working relationship with the Fostering Service to undertake visits and any other partnership work where necessary, providing encouragement to existing Muslim foster children and foster carers (Muslim or non-Muslims) to access services such as mentoring, buddying scheme and other resource and gift packs available from Muslim Foster Network that are designed to accommodate Muslim faith children.
- To encourage and facilitate for non-Muslim carers to visit and learn about the Muslim faith to mosques and other religious or cultural groups which would benefit the care of the child.
- To provide knowledge and guidance around fostering issues and good practice to community stakeholders such as Imams, faith-based groups and interest groups to allow a conducive environment for Muslim foster children to feel a sense of belonging.

3.3 As a result of this growing partnership the Rotherham Muslim Community Forum (RMCF) linked the local authority with the Mercy Mission UK who have prior experience of recruiting foster carers of the Muslim faith in a number of local authorities. Given this experience they are reasonably confident that they could recruit up to 12 new foster carers from the Muslim Community in Rotherham over the course of 2019/20. It is therefore planned that the RMCF use their strong local connections to highlight the pressing need for Muslim foster carers and to act as an initial point of contact for any expressions of interest. These initial expressions of interest will then be passed onto the Mercy Mission UK who will undertake an initial visit to the family in order to undertake a very broad viability assessment. Where appropriate they will then refer the family to the Fostering Service for the full assessment to commence. These families will be supported throughout the assessment process by RMCF.

3.4 In return for this service the Mercy Mission UK will be seeking a monthly retainer of £1950 in order to underwrite marketing and admin costs (£23,400 for the full year effect). In addition they require a finder's fee of £1,950 for every placement payable only at the point of approval. Thus if the target of 12 new foster families is achieved RMBC will pay the Mercy Mission a maximum of £46,800.

3.5 The average annual cost for a placement from an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) is approximately £44k as compared to an in-house placement cost of approximately £15k . Thus over the course of a year there would be a cost reduction of approximately £29k per placement or approximately £348k per annum if all 12 placements are secured. This will significantly more than offset the costs incurred by funding the work provided by the Mercy Mission UK. In fact it will only require the recruitment of 2 new foster families for this proposal to be cost effective.

3.6 The RMCF have also stated that they would require £10,000 to cover the costs they will incur in respect of setting up community events, marketing tools and general office running costs. At this point it is planned that these costs will be underwritten by a local business which is seeking to invest in a CYPS service development as a means of 'putting something back' into the local community. Given the potential for some degree of community reparation arising out of the Muslim Foster Carer project it is felt that this would be an ideal 'investment' for this business organisation.

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

4.1 DLT is recommended to note the contents of this report and to agree to a minimum financial commitment of £23,400 to be paid to the Mercy Mission UK with this rising to £46,800 depending on how many new foster carers are recruited through this process.

#### **5. Consultation**

5.1 This report has been written in consultation with the Finance Department as well as with the Rotherham Muslim Community Forum and the Mercy Mission.

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

6.1 It is planned to 'launch' the project as from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and for it to run, in the first instance, until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Depending on the success of the scheme there may be an application to extend it for a further 12 months.

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

7.1 The proposal to implement the Muslim Foster Care Project will cost £33,400 per annum plus a finder's fee of £1,950 for approval of each foster care family.

7.2 The £33,400 will initially require funding of £23,400 from the CYPS budget with a £10,000 contribution from a local business.

7.3 The total costs for the finder's fee will be dependent on the number of foster carer families approved.

7.4 The average annual cost for a placement from an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) is approximately £44k as compared to an in-house placement cost of approximately £15k. On this basis (£29k saving per place) it will only require the recruitment of 2 additional in-house foster care places for this proposal to be cost effective.

7.5 The advice of the Head of procurement is that CYPS should not be seeking approval to enter into an agreement with just one organisation, without any form of competition.

7.6 In considering the value of contract, any value over £5k needs an element of competition ; any contract below £25k requires 2 quotations, anything above £25k requires a full competitive tender.

7.7 If CYPS are seeking to appoint an organisation directly without going through any form of competition, the Council's Finance and Procurement Procedure Rules do allow for this – and it would be through the use of an exemption. The exemption lists 10 criteria where exemptions are considered and when applying for an exemption you need to be able to justify how your proposal satisfies one of these exemptions.

7.8 It is highly unlikely that there will be any meaningful competition to provide this service for CYPS and that an exemption could be secured on this basis.

7.9 It has also been suggested that an Equality Impact Assessment may be required to consider whether any other ethnic group would benefit from such a process but given the current cohort of looked after children this is highly unlikely.

## **8. Legal Implications**

8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

## **9. Human Resources Implications**

9.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising from this report

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

10.1 This project is designed to improve the outcomes for looked after children of the Muslim faith.

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

11.1 By increasing the number of available Muslim foster carers RMBC will be better placed to provide more appropriately matched placements. As a result of this the religious, cultural and identity needs of these young people will be better met and thus so will their Human Rights.

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

12.1 None noted

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

13.1 There is a risk that no new foster carers will be recruited via this scheme and as a result there will be an additional cost of £23,400 to the Placements Budget.

However, it will only require 2 foster families to be recruited for this scheme to become cost effective.

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

Ian Walker, Head of Service

Approvals Obtained from:-

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Neil Hardwick	8/1/19
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Rebecca Pyle	10/1/19
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	Karen Middlebrook	10/1/19
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Amy Leech	9/1/19

*Report Author: Ian Walker, Head of Service*

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