

Summary Sheet

Report Title

IFA Carers Transfer Protocol

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)

Cheryl Long, Fostering Recruitment Team Manager

Ward(s) Affected

All

Summary

Increasing the in-house foster care placement provision is central to the Sufficiency Strategy and is an important element of financial sustainability of the Directorate. In order to meet the Sufficiency Strategy there needs to be adequate local placement provision and an increase in the number of looked after children in family settings. Increasing in-house fostering placements can be achieved in 3 ways:

- Recruiting new foster carers into the service, whilst taking into account that an average 13% of foster carers will be lost per year due to resignation or deregistration.
- Increasing the capacity of existing in-house foster carers by consultation with them about what the service would need to offer to support and encourage them to care for additional children in their homes where practicable.
- Encouraging and supporting the transfer to the Local Authority of foster carers approved by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA carers) who have Rotherham child(ren) placed with them and have expressed a wish to transfer.

This report will focus on the development of an IFA Carer Transfer Protocol and how this would benefit the Local Authority in respect of increased foster carers. This report will set out the rationale for adopting an IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol, including the potential benefits and challenges.

Recommendations

DLT is recommended to note the contents of this report and to endorse the proposal that an IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol is adopted by the Local Authority.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix A - Principles Governing the Transfer of Foster Carers - Fostering Network 2015

Appendix B - Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England 2014 (reissued 2015)

Appendix C - Anonymised information on IFA carers who have expressed an interest in transferring over

Appendix D – Examples from IFA consultation NFA, Fostering People, TACT

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

IFA Foster Carers Transfer Protocol

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 DLT is recommended to note the contents of this report and to endorse the proposal that an IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol is adopted by the Local Authority.

2. Background

- 2.1 At the start of 2019 RMBC had a Looked After Children's population of 633 children (30/1/19). There were 166 in-house foster carer households including Regulation 24 placements and connected carers. This number of in-house fostering households equated to 175 in-house fostering placements. In addition to our in-house fostering households there were 275 children placed in 178 IFA placements.
- 2.2 This proposal will also support the Demand Management Strategy target of recruiting an additional 36 foster care placements (net) each year between 2019 and 2021.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 Foster carers from the IFA's regularly approach Rotherham Fostering Service enquiring about transferring to the Local Authority. Between October 2017 and August 2019 the recruitment team received 19 enquires from IFA foster carers expressing an interest in transferring over to the Local Authority. Within these 19 enquiries 7 foster carers wanted to transfer, citing that they did not feel that they receive sufficient support, particularly in relation to respite and another 6 foster carers stated that they believed their current agency was not providing them with sufficient placements. 3 enquiries have requested increased allowances in excess of what they currently receive from their agency. A further 3 enquirers wanted information only and did not wish to progress at this stage.
- 3.2 Within the 19 initial enquiries received, one foster carer has successfully transferred to Rotherham Council with a Rotherham child already in placement and has since had another Rotherham child placed. Another was approved in March 2019 and has a Rotherham child matched long term. There is one IFA carer who started being assessed however this assessment has been placed on hold due to concerns regarding the carer and pending investigations. There are a further two IFA foster carers who have strongly expressed an interest in transferring over to the Local Authority.
- 3.3 Feedback from IFA carers indicates that some of the barriers that prevent them from transferring to the Local Authority are broadly:
 - Lack of parity in their allowances. IFA carers do not wish to experience a significant drop in their allowances and fees when they are transferring.
 - Lack of clear protocol about the transfer process. There needs to be a clear and transparent transfer procedure, including the reassessment process and timescales.
- 3.4 In order to successfully attract foster carers from IFAs who have Rotherham children in placement, we need to consider the merit in implementing an IFA Foster Carers Transfer Protocol which would include matching their current fostering allowance as per the Fostering Network Transfer Protocol; the underlying principles governing the transfer of foster carers. (Please see attached appendices.)

3.5 The transfer protocol recognises that:

“All foster carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering services. However, fostering providers should not intentionally entice or persuade foster carers to transfer to a new service in an unethical manner or such that it impacts on placement stability for a child...”

(page 2 Principles governing the transfer of foster carers 2015 - Fostering Network)

3.6 This protocol clearly sets out that it is best practice to match the current allowances of a child in placement as stated below:

“Where it is agreed that a child in placement will continue with a foster carer, the recruiting service should, as a minimum, continue to pay the foster carer their current rates of allowances and fees in relation to that placement. These rates should continue to apply for the duration of the placement, subject to any annual agreed increases and movement through the age bands.”

(page 8 Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England 2014 – Fostering Network)

3.7 Foster carers are paid allowances for their skills and allowances for the children in their care. There are 4 Skills levels starting at level 1 to level 4 (Foster Plus). There is a criteria for progression at each level with the expectation that the higher the level the more skilled the foster carer would be to manage more complex placements. Previously IFA carers have transferred as Foster Plus (level 4) carers and received allowances of £360 per week, skills payment plus allowances for the child, and one-off payments for birthdays, Christmas/Cultural celebrations and holidays. However, IFA carers do not necessarily fit the criteria of Foster Plus (see criteria below) and it is therefore proposed that all IFA carers transferring in will be subject to a skill level assessment based on their experience as a foster carer.

The foster carers will:

- Have no birth children residing in the home with them.
- Provide care on a full time basis, 24 hours a day, expecting one carer to always be available.
- Have previous experience of caring for, working with, or fostering young people.
- Have professional experience of working with children and young people and transferable skills.
- Have a spare room in their house.
- Enhanced therapeutic skills.
- Maintain records and provide reports as required.
- Provide support and supervision to the young person outside the foster home, e.g. within school, recreational settings as determined in the care plan. Placement will be offered (subject to availability) to young people aged 11-17 years.

3.8 This proposal is not to try and fit IFA foster carers into the existing Foster Plus scheme, as it was not designed with IFA foster carers in mind, but to consider the introduction of an IFA Foster Carers Transfer Protocol which recognises the following:

- IFA foster carers with Rotherham children in placement need to have their allowances matched as per the Fostering Network Transfer Protocol for the duration of the placement. This could be several years if the child(ren) in placement are long term matched.
- Should the child in placement move on then subsequent placements would not continue at the same rate. The IFA carer would then receive allowances for the subsequent children in placement at the rates below.

- Furthermore, the proposed Foster Carers Transfer Protocol recognises that they may have children placed under 11 years and have other children in the household including birth children.

3.9 Once an IFA carer transfers over, in the event of their existing child in placement moving on and a new child is placed with the carer, the IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol would allow up to a level 4 skills payment of £360 per week to be paid to the carer in addition to the age-related birthday, celebration and holiday allowances identified in the tables below. All allowances would be subject to a skills level assessment based on their experience as a foster carer. The foster carer could receive the same level 4 allowances as our in-house foster plus carers for subsequent placements; hence there would be some parity of allowances with other in-house carers. The skills level of an IFA foster carer would therefore be assessed prior to transfer and on an ongoing basis.

Revised Fees and Allowance 2019/2020

Skill Level	1st placement	2nd placement	Subsequent placements
1	£100.00	£100.00	£50.00
2	£125.00	£125.00	£62.50
3	£175.00	£175.00	£87.50
4 (Foster Plus)	£360.00	£360.00	£180.00

<Full payment for 1st placement and 2nd Placement, 3rd Placement 50%>

Child Age Amount

0-4	£133.54
5-10	£152.12
11-15	£189.37
16+	£230.30

<Allowances for child to remain the same>

Birthdays, Christmas and Holiday allowances to be paid in addition to the above allowances.

Age	Birthday	Christmas/Cultural celebrations	Holiday
0-4	£133.54	£133.54	£267.08
5-10	£152.12	£152.12	£304.24
11-15	£189.37	£189.37	£378.74
16 plus	£230.30	£230.30	£460.60

<Birthdays & Christmas/ Cultural celebrations= 1 weeks allowance>

<Holiday Pay= 2 weeks allowance>

3.10 The majority of the IFA foster carers that have approached Rotherham have Rotherham children in placement that are already long term matched and it is hoped that these foster carers feel better supported by transferring over to the Local Authority which will lead to better placement stability and better outcomes for the children. 3.11 If IFA foster carers express a wish to transfer over and they do not have any children in placement then they would be

subject to a skill level assessment based on their experience as a foster carer. The transfer of IFA foster carers with no children placed could be based on the following criteria:

- The IFA carer would normally be expected to have had a minimum of two years' experience of fostering children over 8 years old and will be subject to a skills level assessment undertaken during their fostering assessment.

3.12 If the proposed Transfer Protocol was adopted there would be significant cost reductions of each IFA foster carer transferring over to the Local Authority with Rotherham children in placement as the Local Authority would no longer have the ongoing costs of the Agency fees (Please see examples on the attached appendix C).

3.13 The proposed criteria for IFA Foster Carers Transfer Protocol is:

- IFA foster carer has a Rotherham child placed. Ideally the child/ren in placement are long term matched to the foster carer.
- IFA foster carers will be subject to a skills assessment and prepared to attend Skills to Foster training to familiarise themselves with what it will be like to foster for RMBC.
- IFA foster carers who do not have Rotherham child/ren in placement normally need to have fostered for a minimum of 2 years and be able to support children over 8 years old. They will also be subject to a skills assessment.
- Foster carers are willing to be reassessed as a foster carer in accordance with Fostering National Standards and also attend fostering panel and complete a skills assessment.
- Foster carer will complete their fostering Training and Development Standards (TDS). This will normally be completed within the first year of approval, although it is unlikely that the foster carer will be transferring over without having completed their TDS.
- Foster carer is willing to access training and development opportunities available to them as stipulated in their Personal Development Plan including Therapeutic Parenting Training.
- One of the carers will need to be available full time to support the needs of the child/ren in placement.
- Attend support groups and contribute towards the development of the service, eg foster carer forums and consultation events.
- Support foster carer recruitment events.
- Willingness to receive professional instruction and work in partnership with RMBC, the child's social worker and supervising social worker in the best interests of the child.
- Foster carers accept that where a matching allowance is initially agreed if the child/ren in placement move on then subsequent allowances will fall in line with the allowance schedule and skills levels.
- Transfer protocol meeting to be held with the foster carer, child's social worker and supervising social worker to ensure that IFA are fully aware of the transfer and there is due consideration given to the impact on the child in placement by them transferring to RMBC.

3.14 Implementation of the scheme will require new publicity materials to be developed to promote the IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol. A separate leaflet is to be sent out to all IFA carers who enquire or have previously enquired explaining the Transfer Protocol and procedure. A dedicated area of the website will be set up for IFA foster carers to advise on details about the transfer procedure. Promotion of the Transfer Protocol to child social workers will be undertaken at Whole Service Events and team meetings.

3.15 The benefits of the scheme will include:

- A transparent transfer process which will give guidance to IFA foster carers and children's social workers on transfers into the Local Authority with Rotherham children in placement.
- Improved communication and consultation between children's social worker and supervising social workers who will be co-located within Riverside House.
- Better oversight on the placements for the Local Authority, as the IFA foster carer once transferred over will be an in-house carer and supervised and supported by Rotherham's social workers.
- The IFA foster carer would benefit from feeling better supported, which would support placement stability. Joint visits could be more easily arranged particularly, if the placement is out of area.
- Children in placement should not experience any significant change by the transfer to the Local Authority. In some instances there may be increased benefits to children if their siblings are already placed with in-house foster carers.
- IFA foster carers should not feel that they will experience any significant reduction in their current fostering allowances when transferring over.
- The Local Authority will realise significant cost reductions on each IFA foster carer who has a child in placement due to no longer paying the Agency fees (see examples outlined in appendix C)

3.16 The potential issues arising from the proposals will include:

- Mainstream existing foster carers may not be happy that Rotherham Council are matching the allowances of IFA foster carers, as in most instances the allowances will exceed the allowances that in-house foster carers receive.
- There is a risk that existing foster carers become demotivated and do not feel that they are of equal value to IFA foster carers. Ultimately there is a risk that in-house foster carers could decide to exit the service, thus impacting on retention.
- In order to minimise this there would need to be further consultation with foster carers. Further work and consultation has already been undertaken by the fostering service with regard to the feasibility of offering an additional skills payment to mainstream foster carers who have more than one child in placement. The revised allowances have been agreed by Cabinet in June 2019 and therefore foster carers will now receive a Skills Payment for each child. This could result in in-house carers feeling more satisfied with the allowances available and increase the overall in-house fostering capacity. Informal consultation on this potential protocol was undertaken with Rotherham's foster carers at the Foster Carer Forum in March 2019, with the carers understanding that as an authority we need to readdress the balance by reducing the number of IFA placements. They acknowledged that it was fair that subsequent placements would be within our allowance structure.
- An analysis of foster carer's current capacity (e.g. age range and approval types) was undertaken to identify the needs of the service to increase in-house capacity for all age ranges and approval types. The data identified that there is an existing reduced in-house capacity for siblings and older teens. Transferring in IFA carers will assist with diversifying our current range, particularly any IFA carers who transfer over with no children in placement or older children.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

DLT is recommended to note the contents of this report and to agree with the proposal to implement an IFA Foster Carers Transfer Protocol. Options that could be considered are:

- **Option 1-** To implement the policy for carers transferring from an IFA with RMBC children in placement e.g. honouring the payments they receive from the IFA for the duration of that placement. This to include IFA carers without children coming across to RMBC if they are able to evidence fostering for 2 years plus and for age 8 years upwards and subject to a skill level assessment. If they wish to transfer then there could be an agreement that we pay the current agency an amount to reimburse against the cost of an assessment being completed (Circa £2,000). This is consistent with the findings of the Narey Report¹ which notes at page 55-56 that *“sometimes, local authorities will be acting prudently in seeking to transfer IFA carers to them when a placement is considered to become long term (because the marginal costs of an additional in-house carer is much smaller than a fee paid to an IFA). When that happens, we believe local authorities should compensate the IFA for the recruitment costs of replacing that carer.”*
- **Option 2-** To implement the policy for carers transferring from an IFA with RMBC children in placement e.g. honouring the payments they receive from the IFA for the duration of that placement. This to include IFA carers without children coming across to RMBC if they are able to evidence fostering for 2 years plus and for age 8 years upwards and subject to a skill level assessment.
- **Option 3-** To implement the policy for carers transferring from an IFA with RMBC children in placement e.g. honouring the payments they receive from the IFA for the duration of that placement only.

4.1 DLT is recommended to note the contents of this report and to agree with the proposal to implement an IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol.

¹Foster Care in England: A Review for the Department for Education by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers (February 2018)

5. Consultation

5.1 There was a brief Consultation with foster carers at the March Foster Carer Forum. RMBC carers seemed to overall be positive of the need to attract IFA carers and to grow our in-house foster carer base if it meant the benefit of reducing the significant spend on IFA placements and keeping Rotherham children in locality with the overarching support from RMBC. Our carers understood that carers transferring across and having their IFA payments honoured for the duration of that placement with an RMBC child was fair and in line with Fostering Networks recommended Transfer Protocol. They also appreciated that other IFA carers transferring without children in placement would be subject to a skills assessment based on experience before being eligible for Level 3 or 4 which felt fair.

5.2 There has also been consultation with the IFA providers that RMBC currently work with to gain their views in regard to this draft policy. The Commissioning Team's Head of Service spoke firstly with the IFA's at the May 2019 Provider Meeting. This was not received positively and there were some suggestions that if this was implemented that they would prioritise responding to other LA referrals before RMBC and potentially this would mean placing RMBC children at greater distance from Rotherham.

5.3 Following this meeting we then sent out a survey consultation to all of the IFAs on the RMBC Framework. The response, whilst varied in detail, was still overall quite negative to elements of the Transfer Protocol. Feedback forms from some of the main IFA Providers are attached to this report but in brief summary IFAs expressed concerns that related in main to the risk/ loss posed from significant investment in their carers. The IFAs also seemed to be under the misunderstanding that RMBC would be actively seeking to poach carers from them which was never the purpose or suggestion of implementing this Protocol.

5.4 Following the consultation with IFAs contact was made by Marie Tucker from the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP) wishing to know more about the response from providers from our consultation. They expressed that they were impressed with RMBC's openness and transparency in consulting with IFAs however they also wanted to give their input and views to see that this reflected correctly with the responses from the IFAs.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 The IFA Foster Carer Transfer Protocol is ready to be implemented once approval is given and consultation with RMBC foster carers completed and the Local Authority should realise significant cost reductions from early in the next financial year 2019-20 once IFA foster carers begin to transfer over in accordance with the Protocol.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 As at 31st August 2019 there are currently 270 children residing in IFA placements. The estimated cost for these placements is circa £11.5m per annum. This is against 165 in-house placements costing £3.3m.

7.2 The average cost of current IFA placements is £846 per week (£44k per annum). For the most complex children the weekly cost rises to an average of £1,056 per week an annual cost of approximately £55K, whilst solo placements currently cost in the region of £1,262 per week (£66K annually).

7.3 Based on the last fostering tender exercise, the split in costs is on average 40% (carer) and 60% (agency). Assuming this split, we would estimate the carer receives on average £338 per week (£18K), £423 per week for a complex placement (£22K per annum) and £508 (£26K per annum) for a solo placement.

7.4 All three options support an IFA carer transferring with a child continuing to receive their current payment for the duration of that child's care. Based on saving the 60% IFA margin we would look to save £26K per annum per place on an average placement. Savings increase for the more complex placements at £33K per annum and £40K per annum for solo placements. The table below sets out the potential savings:

	Average Annual IFA cost	Carer - 40%	Potential IFA Saving - 60%	Weekly Carer Pymnt	Weekly IFA Saving
Carer Type	£	£	£	£	£
Average Cost	44,000	17,600	26,400	338	508
Complex Care	55,000	22,000	33,000	423	635
Solo Placement	66,000	26,400	39,600	508	762

Placement examples are based on 1 child, if more than 1 child transfers then subsequent placement savings would be made but this would be reduced by the IFA agencies sibling discount.

- 7.5 For IFA carers transferring without a child and IFA carers who transfer with a child but that placement ceases the carer would be subject to a skills level assessment based on Rotherham's current Foster Care rates.
- 7.6 In-house foster care averages £346 per week, £18K per annum. The payments range from a Level 1 foster carer (limited fostering experience and younger children) receiving approximately £15K per annum (£288 per week) to a Level 4 carer (through the protocol 2 years' experience and 8+) at £29k per annum (£558 per week).
- 7.7 Based on a 1 child placement, the potential savings of a Level 4 carer against an IFA placement would range between £15K per annum for an average IFA placement, £26K per annum for a complex IFA carer and £37K for a solo place.
- 7.8 If option 1, to actively seek to recruit IFA carers for matched Rotherham children, is agreed, a compensation fee of circa £2,000 per carer could be payable to the IFA to compensate for recruitment costs.

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 the recommendations within this report

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 10.1 Within the protocol it is stipulated that a transfer protocol meeting is undertaken which ensures that the needs of the children in placement remain central to any proposed transfer from fostering agency to local authority.

11. Equalities and Human Rights Implications

- 11.1 There are no equalities and human rights implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

- 12.1 None noted.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 There is a risk that existing foster carers feel that they do not receive parity in their allowances with IFA carers transferring over. This may lead to foster carers feeling demotivated and they may decide to leave the service. Existing carers have been consulted about the proposed Protocol and the context around this, including that matching existing allowances of foster carers is considered best practice from Fostering Network, who are a National Charity who advocate for all foster carers. In addition the Local Authority have recently implemented a revised allowances schedule which includes additional skills payments to foster carers who are

able to increase their fostering capacity and offer more fostering placements. Also, this allowance schedule will be more attractive to prospective foster carers and IFA carers.

14. **Accountable Officer(s)**

Approvals Obtained from:-

	Named Officer	Date
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Neil Hardwick	
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Rebecca Pyle	
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	Karen Middlebrook	
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Amy Leech	

Report Author: Cheryl Long, Fostering Recruitment Team Manager

This report is published on the Council's website or can be found at:-

<http://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?Categories=>