

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 29 January 2020

Report Title

Update on the Strategy to Increase In-House Foster Carers and Related Budget Profile and Targets

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

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Sally Hodges, Interim Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

Neil Hardwick, Head of CYPS Finance

Jenny Lingrell, Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance & Inclusion

Ward(s) Affected

Borough Wide

Report Summary

The report builds upon previous reports to OSMB which identified the activity that is in progress to increase the number of in-house foster carers, and the impact that this will have on the fostering targets and budget profile.

Recommendations

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is asked to:

1. Note the fostering placement budget and target profiles for in-house fostering and independent fostering placements.
2. Note the activity that will increase the number of foster carers in the final quarter of 2019/20 and throughout 2020/21.

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

Revised Foster Carer Fees and Allowances Payment Scheme Cabinet – 08 July 2019

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Update on the Strategy to Increase In-House Foster Carers and Related Budget Profile and Targets

1. Background

- 1.1 The vision in Rotherham is 'Working with Rotherham's children, young people and families to be safe, resilient and successful'. The Council is seeking to improve the care experience for children in Rotherham by ensuring that wherever possible they are looked after in a foster family environment.
- 1.2 It is well understood that the needs of children and young people can only be met effectively if they live in an environment that provides a high quality of care and support, generally within a family home setting and in a geographical location that is familiar. Wherever possible, children and young people should be placed within their own community which enables them to continue to have contact with the people and community of the most importance to them, thus promoting identity and a strong sense of self, fundamental to resilience in later life. In addition, placing children in the RMBC area ensures a better oversight and control over educational provision and other support services such as health, including support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- 1.3 Recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers is at the heart of Rotherham's LAC Sufficiency Strategy; 82% of Rotherham's LAC population are in family-based settings, however, more children are placed through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) than with in-house foster carers. In 2018/19 the Council spent £11.122m on 263 IFA placements compared to £3.188m on 167 in-house placements, equating to a 61/39% split respectively.
- 1.4 The objective of the LAC Sufficiency Strategy is to change the placement mix; increasing the proportion of Looked After Children placed with in-house foster carers. The activity outlined in this report are part of delivering that change. Increasing the number of in-house carers is critical to ensuring that Rotherham:
 - Has a range of suitable placements available to meet current and future placement needs.
 - Is able to reduce overall placement costs and avoid more expensive Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and out of borough residential placements.
 - Is able to meet the needs of individual children and young people in our care by creating stable, secure and high quality family placements.
 - Supports children and young people in our care to maintain contact with birth families, essential services and their local community.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 In order to set a robust budget for 2019/20 and 2020/21 a review of the CYPS budget was undertaken in order to identify cost reductions that can be expected to be achieved over and above delivery of the budget savings.
- 2.2 To reduce the budget pressure and achieve the budget savings means reducing spend in CYPS by £9.7m in 2019/20 and by £19.9m in 2020/21.
- 2.3 A major element in the reduced budget estimates is the placement projections which reflect a transfer in the number of high cost to lower cost placements, combined with a reduction in LAC numbers from 654 to 600 by March 2020 and to 541 by March 2021, see table below for the net original budget profile changes.

LAC Reductions	19/20	20/21	Total
External Residential	-31	-18	-49
Block Contracts	13	0	13
IFA's	-44	-49	-93
In-house	8	8	16
Total	-54	-59	-113
Adoptions	30	30	60

- 2.4 The LAC Sufficiency Strategy will not be achieved through the increase in in-house foster carers alone. There is also activity to increase the number of in-borough residential placements, and ensure that the right commissioning frameworks are in place to manage placements with Independent Fostering Agencies and placements of children over the age of 16 in supported accommodation. The ongoing delivery of the House Project will also support Care Leavers to move into their own tenancy. The Right Child, Right Care project will work to reduce the overall number of children who are Looked After.

3. Actions to Increase Children Placed with In-house Foster Carers

- 3.1 To achieve growth in the number of young people placed with in-house foster carers CYPS have implemented the following workstreams:
- 3.1.1 A revised fees and allowances payment scheme for in-house foster carers to encourage additional placements within existing approved fostering households**
- The Allowance Scheme was reviewed in July 2019 following full consultation with the Foster Carer Association. This review took place in recognition of the fact that the existing allowance did not sufficiently incentivise carers to take more than one placement or children from the older age ranges. Following the launch of the new scheme 11 foster carers expressed an interest in offering 12 new placements and their change in approval is being progressed through the Foster Panel process with a view to completion by the end of January.

3.1.2 Introduced the Muslim Foster Carer project

There have been two community events hosted by the Rotherham Muslim Community Forum to highlight the need of looked after children from the Muslim faith to be offered more religiously and culturally matched placements. In addition this project has highlighted for the community that fostering and adoption is wholly within the key principles of the Muslim faith. Given the legacy of issues between the Council and the Muslim community this was always going to be a 'slow burn process' and a third community event is currently being planned to sustain the momentum already achieved. There has also been a lot of learning to be had on both sides to ensure that resources are best directed and it has become clear that there are some significant barriers to members of the Muslim community being assessed in a reasonable timescale e.g. the need to seek appropriate references from agencies in Pakistan. This has unduly aggravated the drop-out rate. At present there has only been one prospective carer progressed to a full assessment with one other about to commence but the learning curve has been steep and RMBC remains very much a pioneer local authority in this work.

3.1.3 Allocated capital funds for Pathways to Care to deliver adaptations to the homes of foster carers, allowing them to have an additional child in placement.

The Pathways to Care policy was revised in April 2019 to ensure it was focussed very much on reducing the numbers of looked after children and reliance on out of authority placements by:-

- Increasing bedroom capacity for existing foster carers to enable them to take an additional placement.
- Enabling extended family members to become 'Kinship Foster Carers' for a named child where a lack of bedroom space would have been otherwise prohibitive.
- Supporting extended family members to assume the care of a child via Special Guardianship Orders/Child Arrangement Orders and therefore prevent the child becoming looked after when again the lack of bedroom space would be prohibitive.

This last criterion is by far the most common cause for the Policy to be implemented and has successfully diverted 5 children from being looked after this financial year. In addition there is one existing foster carer whose building works are about to commence and another at the start of the approval process which will provide 2 additional placements in total. Given that the average cost for an Independent Foster Agency placement is c.£45k per annum and there is a tapered repayment scheme should the carers end their fostering career or the child leave the household within a 10 year timescale this remains a cost effective investment.

3.1.4 Agreed a Strategic Partnership with Brightsparks

In September 2019, Rotherham entered into an agreement with Bright Sparks to fundamentally change the way that the foster carer recruitment strategy. Bright Sparks is a creative communications and business development agency that works exclusively with social purpose organisations to help them start up, grow and improve services they provide that make a difference to people's lives and society.

Bright Sparks have developed a social media campaign, built on the Rotherham brand and values, and promoting key messages to potential foster carers. They also manage a media buying strategy that promotes the Rotherham message via Google, Facebook and Instagram.

Bright Sparks have developed a purpose-built website to promote the Rotherham offer. The website has the necessary technical functionality to capture interest from the social media campaign. The Customer Relationship Management tools ensure that media buying is targeted to encourage repeat visits to the Rotherham website, and would make use of tools such as a live web chat, blog posts and email.

Since the campaign was launched, there have been 2 million page impressions and 1.5k unique visitors to www.fosteringrotherham.com. 603 direct enquiries have been received via live chat, website forms, email and social media. 54 face to face information visits have been booked.

If 50% of the current enquiries progress to become approved foster carers, this would be 6.5 new foster carers by the end of March 2020. If the rate of conversion increases to 75% this would be 9 new foster carers. It is planned that this level of activity will continue throughout 2020.

4. Monitoring the Recruitment & Deregistration of In-house Foster Carers

- 4.1 CYPS have established and implemented a performance monitor to track the number of foster carers recruited and deregistered in the current financial year. The monitoring report also identifies the number of carers at each stage of the process.
- 4.2 Work is currently ongoing to enhance the current monitoring reports to estimate the number and timescales of future foster care approvals based on the number of potential foster carers at each stage of the recruitment process.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The CYPS budget plan is a two year financial recovery plan which is to be achieved predominantly through safely reducing the caseloads in children's social care and altering the current placement mix from high cost to more cost effective placements. One of the key elements of this strategy is growing the capacity of in-house foster carers.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The 2019/20 CYPS budget was based on a net increase of 8 in-house foster care placements and a reduction of 44 independent sector foster placements as set out in paragraph 2.3.

- 6.2 The position at the end of December is an actual increase to date of two children placed with in-house foster carers and a reduction of three independent fostering placements. The estimated projections from January to year end are an increase of 11 children placed with in-house foster carers and a further reduction of 16 independent fostering placements.

Placement Type	Net Budget	Net Forecast December	Net Variance (Dec Fore Budget)	Lac No.s @ 31 March 19	Actuals Nov 19	Actuals Dec 19	Estimate Jan 20	Estimate Feb 20	Estimate Mar 20	Actual Variance Mar 19 to Dec 19	Estimated Variance 31 Mar 19 to 31 Mar 20
In - house Fostering	3,233,021	3,353,192	120,171	147	154	149	151	153	160	2	13
Fostering - Family & Friends (included in above budget)	0		0	20	26	23	23	23	23	3	3
S38/6	0	100,000	100,000	13	13	10	10	10	10	-3	-3
Total In-House Fosting Plac	3,233,021	3,453,192	220,171	180	193	182	184	186	193	2	13
Fostering Independent Placer	11,451,566	11,122,231	-329,335	263	258	260	252	251	244	-3	-19
Total Fostering Placements	14,684,587	14,575,423	-109,164	443	451	442	436	437	437	-1	-6

- 6.3 The CYPS placement budget is £31.2m with £24.8m allocated to LAC placements of which £14.7m is allocated to foster care placements. The budget position at the end of December is an £109k underspend across all fostering placement budgets as outlined in the table above.

- 6.4 The number of children placed with in-house foster care placements is estimated to be 160 at the 31 March 2020 compared to a 2020/21 budget of 182 on the 1 April 2020 which is a shortfall of 22. The budget target for 2020/21 is to increase the number of children placed with in-house foster carers by 47, and 229 in total.

- 6.5 The number of children placed with independent foster care placements is estimated to be 244 at the 31 March 2020 compared to a 2020/21 budget of 245 on the 1 April 2020 which is currently on target. The budget target for 2020/21 is to reduce the number of c

7. Risks and Mitigation

- 7.1 The net growth in capacity of in-house foster carers is based on having a competitive in-house foster carers fees and allowances payment scheme, a successful digital marketing service and an efficient assessment / recruitment process. There is a risk that the number of enquiries may not lead to the successful recruitment of foster carers or that the age bands and skills of the foster carers do not match the age range and skills required to support the children in care which will therefore impact on the achievability of the plan.

8. Name and contact details

Neil Hardwick
 Head of Finance (CYPS)
 01709 254508 or neil.hardwick@rotherham.gov.uk

Jenny Lingrell
 Joint Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance & Inclusion
 01709 254836 or jenny.lingrell@rotherham.gov.uk