

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Cabinet – 18 March 2024

**Report Title**

The Fostering Plan Update

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

Yes

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Nicola Curley, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

**Report Author(s)**

Jane Wood, Head of Service for Children in Care  
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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

This report is being provided to Cabinet as an update in respect of the Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028, the Fostering Elected Members Working Group, the Fostering and Adoption Panel and One Adoption South Yorkshire.

**Recommendations**

That Cabinet:-

1. Endorse the Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028 as a working document, to proceed with ongoing developments in the service.
2. Endorse the recommendations from the Fostering Elected Members Working Group.
3. Agree to the proposals in respect of the Fostering and Adoption Panels and delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Assistant Director of Legal Services to amend the Terms of Reference.

4. Approve three years of continued involvement with South Yorkshire Adoption Agency and delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Assistant Director of Legal Services to ensure arrangements are in place to facilitate the continued involvement.

### **List of Appendices Included**

- Appendix 1 Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028
- Appendix 2 RAA Terms of Reference, March 2023
- Appendix 3 Part A Initial Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix 4 Part B Equality Analysis Form
- Appendix 5 Carbon Impact Assessment

### **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 Fostering Plan Update**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Council is working with partners to ensure that Fostering Rotherham is a robust service, with strong practice and an excellent offer for foster carers. This is designed to ensure that children in care are provided with high quality, family-based placements.
- 1.2 The Council have produced detailed strategies to inform planning in respect of recruitment, retention and service delivery and have reviewed these at frequent stages. The scale and pace of change has produced some excellent results in 2023 to 2024, most notably recruiting the most fostering households since 2019. This year the Council have provided a net increase of an additional 26 available placements for children to date since April 2023 and a net increase of foster carers and placements for the first time since 2019. This is a result of a net increase of 9 fostering households and the replacement of foster carers who previously had placements on hold.
- 1.3 The Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028 (Appendix One) sets out the five-year strategy to recruit, retain and grow in house foster carers to provide stable and enduring homes for the borough's children and young people. Children and young people should live in nurturing homes where they receive high quality and consistent care. This plan sets out how the Council intend to achieve this for children and young people in Rotherham. This plan sits alongside the Rotherham Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 and the Rotherham Looked after Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028.
- 1.4 The Elected Members Fostering Working Group was formed in March 2023. The focus of this Group has been on what Elected Members can do to support Fostering recruitment and retention and wider issues with the Fostering Service in the Rotherham Community. The Elected Members Fostering Working Group has supported and endorsed the Fostering Rotherham Plan and new fees and allowances which were approved at Cabinet in November. They have also helped to raise the profile of Fostering Rotherham and Members continue to champion fostering across Rotherham, evidencing strong political cross-party support.
- 1.5 Fostering and Adoption Panels are a mandatory operational function, which consider new applicants to fostering or adoption, ongoing approvals of foster carers or adopters and matching between children and prospective foster carers or adopters. Fostering and Adoption Panels have the purpose of considering all available information to formulate a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker of Fostering or Adoption, who will make a final decision.
- 1.6 Until March 2011, it was a legal requirement for at least one Elected Member of the Local Authority to sit on Adoption and Fostering Panels. The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 determined that this was no longer a requirement and was optional for Local Authorities. Rotherham Council have

continued the practice of Elected Members sitting on Panel to date. While this has been of benefit to the Panels, this practice is resource intensive and requires Elected Members to undertake frequent training and attend at least 75% of panels. As the pool of foster carers increases, this use of resource will continue to expand and is out of step with the 2011 Regulations and best practice. Other Local Authorities take a variety of approaches, but none of the South Yorkshire Authorities include Elected Members on these operational panels.

- 1.7 One Adoption South Yorkshire is the regional adoption agency (RAA) managing adoption services for Rotherham, Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster. Regional adoption agencies are a government led initiative, to enhance efficiency in adoption services across the Country. The expectation is for organisations to pool their resources and share best practice, with the aim of recruiting a diverse cohort of adopters and providing high quality service delivery. The RAA in South Yorkshire is a partnership arrangement, led by Doncaster Local Authority on behalf of the four partner Local Authorities. Staff continue to be employed by their own Authority, whilst the host Authority has delegated responsibilities through the RAA Governance Board to commission activities to meet the needs of children, adoptive families and birth families within the parameters of the agreed RAA pooled budget. The Terms of Reference for the Board are attached at Appendix 2. The RAA agreed to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership in 2024-2025 and will consider the ongoing arrangements for adoption services to ensure it continues to offer high quality services and best value for all four involved Local Authorities.

## **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 The Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028 sets out what has been achieved so far within the Service and outlines a number of targets to achieve over the next five years. These include increasing the net number of foster carers each year, enhancing the diversity of foster carers and the number of bespoke foster carers, skilled to care for children with disabilities, adolescents, sibling groups and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Council intends to reduce the use of independent fostering agency carers and promote the resilience and skills of our in house foster carers. The Fostering Plan details how the goals will be achieved and continue to improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery in Fostering Rotherham.
- 2.2 The key achievements within the Fostering Rotherham service over the last 12 months are as follows;
- Providing in house foster carers with a competitive offer for skills, complexity and respite.
  - Providing a high-quality service, support and training package for foster carers.
  - Uplifting fees and allowances in line with the national increases, including celebration allowances.

- A net increase in fostering households and available placements for children overall.
- Quality assurance and performance data will be utilised to review the progress of the Plan and the impact for the service on a monthly basis.

2.3 Progress on the Fostering Rotherham service and the Fostering Plan will report into the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board. The Board reports to Council and Scrutiny annually.

## 2.4 **Elected Members Fostering Working Group**

2.4.1 The Elected Members Fostering Working Group was established in March 2023 and concluded in January 2024.

2.4.2 The aim of the Working Group in their Corporate Parenting role was to support the increase in the number of Foster Carers who can provide loving homes for the children of Rotherham who need care.

2.4.3 The focus of this group has been on what Elected Members can do to support fostering recruitment and retention and how they can raise the profile of the Fostering Service within the Rotherham Community.

2.4.4 There were two strands to this work: to retain the existing foster carers and fostering families and increase the number of children for which they feel able to offer their care and support; and to recruit foster carers and families with the right skills who are committed to providing loving homes for children.

2.4.5 The Working Group had five key lines of enquiry:

1. What is the current offer for our foster carers and how is this marketed? Why Foster for Rotherham? This should include an update on work looking at how the Service uses behaviour change methodologies to underpin a new recruitment campaign.
2. What are other authorities doing? Is anyone bucking the national trend and not only recruiting foster carers and families but also addressing retention issues?
3. How can we increase the diversity of our fostering families?
4. How can Elected Members contribute to recruitment and retention of foster carers/families/increase in placements?
5. Are we doing enough across the Council?
  - a. What do we contribute as One Council?
  - b. What do/can our partners contribute eg Police, Health, Chamber of Commerce, The College?

2.4.6 The Working Group was a Member-led working group offered to all parties across the Council and included the following attendees:

Cllr Cusworth, Lead Member and Chair of the Working Group.

Cllr Joanna Baker-Rogers

Cllr Michael Bennett-Sylvester

Cllr Rob Elliott

Cllr Tony Griffin

Cllr Gina Monk

Monica Green (Assistant Director)

Jane Wood (Head of Service)

Toni Traynor (Service Manager)

William Wilcock (Senior Communications Officer)

Kelly Oxer (Fostering Marketing Manager)

2.4.7 Guest speakers were invited to attend specific sessions. This included Bright Sparks and a Foster Carer.

2.4.8 Nine two-hour meetings took place and covered the following agenda items:

- Session 1: Introductory meeting to agree terms of reference.
- Session 2: Meeting to set the scene including the current number of foster carers and placements; data from 2019 to present around recruitment and retention; behaviour change methodologies that inform marketing and recruitment campaigns; structure of the service.
- Session 3: Discussion of good practice identified through desktop research; review Authorities who are seeing success in recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.
- Session 4: Update on Fostering performance and recruitment activities; briefing on marketing strategies, including a presentation by Bright Sparks.
- Session 5: Update on Fostering performance and recruitment activities; development of partnership pledge work.
- Session 6: Fostering recruitment update and internal Council pledge work.
- Session 7: Update on Fostering performance and recruitment activities; consideration of Elected Member involvement in the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.
- Session 8: Update on Fostering performance and recruitment activities; consideration of ways to increase the diversity of our foster carers and families including the current recruitment strategy.
- Session 9: Agree recommendations from the Working Group.

- 2.4.9 The Elected Members Fostering Working Group used a combination of briefings, desktop research by members, and workshop style meetings with officers from Fostering and the Communications Service. They considered officer views and ideas in an advisory and supportive way.
- 2.4.10 The Elected Members Fostering Working Group has supported and endorsed the Fostering Rotherham Plan and new fees and allowances which were approved at Cabinet in November.
- 2.4.11 The further key recommendations from the Working Group include:
- Celebrating our Fostering Families throughout the year
  - Elected Members to champion Fostering Rotherham and for foster carers and those leaving care to know the details of their Ward Councillor
  - Maximising the reach of communications and advertising in order to increase recruitment of Foster Carers, including from a diverse background, representative of our community in Rotherham.
  - Maximising the diversity of our workforce in Children and Young People's Services and to improve diversity of our Foster Carers to reflect the demographic in Rotherham.
- 2.4.12 The Working Group has also suggested three activities, which can be undertaken by Elected Members to support the profile of Fostering Rotherham. These include;
- participating in one fostering recruitment activity.
  - a leaflet drop.
  - contacting one local business.
- 2.4.13 It is recommended that from May 2024, Elected Members will be informed of these proposals in induction processes and invited to consider if they are able to action any of the suggested activities.
- 2.4.14 The Working Group also recommended additional areas of work outside of the fostering service:
- Strengthen the placement choice for our children in order to provide strong placement matches.
  - Tasking the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board to establish a subgroup in the new municipal year to further the work around diversity within the workforce and our foster carers and understand further the over representation of ethnic minority children in our care.
- 2.4.15 The Elected Members Fostering Working Group has contributed significantly to the overall Fostering Plan during the year and is thanked for its commitment to children in the Borough and its support of the Fostering Service in striving to continually improve service delivery. It has helped raise the profile of

Fostering Rotherham and Members continue to champion fostering across Rotherham.

## 2.5 **Fostering and Adoption Panels**

It is proposed that in the new municipal year, Fostering and Adoption Panels will be conducted without Cabinet Members as panel members. The Portfolio holder will be able to observe Fostering and Adoption Panels without participating in panel recommendations. Fostering and Adoption, including panel functions, will be reported into the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board to ensure continued scrutiny and oversight. The number of Elected Members on the Panel will be increased, where their involvement and oversight will have a greater impact on a wider range of children in care.

## 2.6 **Regional Adoption Agency**

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) are a requirement set by the Government. Rotherham must be part of such an agency and would need to identify another RAA to join before it could serve notice on One Adoption South Yorkshire. There are geographical and partnership advantages to belonging to One Adoption South Yorkshire for the Local Authority, children and prospective adopters and it is proposed that this arrangement continue for a further three years.

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

### 3.1 Options available to Cabinet are as follows:

Option 1 – not to endorse the Fostering Rotherham Plan, accept the recommendations from the Elected Members Working Group, amend panel membership or continue Rotherham's involvement in One Adoption South Yorkshire. This would hinder progress in improving Rotherham's fostering services and continue not to utilise Member time in the most effective way possible. It would also result in non-compliance with the requirement to be part of a regional adoption agency. Therefore, this option is not recommended.

### 3.2 Option 2 that Cabinet:

- Endorses the Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028. This will enable the Fostering Rotherham service to continue to enhance the service delivery and increase the number of high-quality foster carers and placements available for children.
- Endorses the recommendations from the Fostering Elected Members Working Group. This will promote the profile of fostering across Rotherham and support the recruitment and retention strategy. A further more detailed report to the Lead Member for Children's Services and Strategic Director of Children and Young People will follow.
- Agrees that Elected Members are no longer required to sit as panel members on Fostering and Adoption Panels. This will provide Elected Members with additional capacity to assist with alternative areas of focus.



- Approves three years of continued involvement with South Yorkshire Adoption Agency. This will ensure consistency in service delivery and increase the availability of prospective adopters for children in Rotherham.

3.3 This option will enable continued service delivery and development, whilst ensuring full compliance with Government policy. This is the recommended option.

#### **4. Consultation on proposal**

4.1 The development of the Fostering Rotherham Plan has involved a number of partner agencies across Rotherham, including health, education, commissioning, performance and finance. The Fostering Rotherham Plan continues to be reviewed at the Strategic Fostering Board and through the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board.

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

5.1 It is proposed that the recommendations set out above commence in the new municipal year.

#### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

6.1 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report.

6.2 There are no direct financial implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report.

#### **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

7.1 The Fostering Panel approval requirements and powers are set out in The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 which introduced the concept of long-term fostering. Section 1 and 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 also set out corporate parenting principles, with statutory guidance published about applying the corporate parenting principles to looked after children in 2018 with the combined aim of ensuring the care needs of all looked after children and care leavers are met, keeping children safe and stable in their homes to promote high aspirations and to secure the best outcomes.

7.2 As set out in this paper, the proposal to increase the number of high-quality foster carers and increasing the number of placements for children in the interests of promoting their welfare, is in keeping with aims of the Children Act 1989. Furthermore, it has also been re-emphasised in the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, “that children who need help and protection deserve high-quality and effective support.” These points have been considered in this report and therefore no legal implications arise from this report.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

8.1 HR will continue to provide support and advice from a workforce perspective when required and continue to work with the HR RAA – One adoption group.

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

9.1 Implications for children, young people and vulnerable adults are considered within the report.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

10.1 Equality and human rights are considered within the report.

## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

11.1 Any implications are included in Appendix 5 Carbon Impact Assessment

## **12. Implications for Partners**

12.1 Implications for partners are reflected in the report.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

13.1 These are referred to in the report.

## **14. Accountable Officers**

14.1 Monica Green, Assistant Director Childrens Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	04/03/24
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	27/02/24
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	27/02/24

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