

Fostering Agency Report

Purpose

- 1.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the executive side of the local authority:
- a. Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
 - b. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months;
 - c. Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration and National Minimum Standards for fostering.

(Standard 25.7)

The Fostering Agency is required to produce a Statement of Purpose updated on an annual basis. The current Statement of Purpose was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in October 2019. The Statement of Purpose has been updated for 2020 and is attached as appendix 1.

This report covers the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

1.2 Summary for Children and Young People

This is the annual report of work undertaken by the Fostering Service. The Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board continues to monitor the strategic developments and improvements to all aspects of delivering a fostering service that contributes to the increase in foster carers and retention of fostering households for Derby City children.

The report explains the role of the fostering panel and provides data for the number of carers approved and the number of carers who have chosen to leave the service. Complaints received about foster carers from a range of different people are also included, particularly if this has led to de-registration of a foster carers approval.

Two workstreams evolved from the work directed by the Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board. These were Marketing and Sales and Pathway to Approval. During 2019/20 the Marketing and Sales workstream delivered on a number of improvements including a new fostering marketing strategy for 2020 (Appendix 2). The Pathway to Approval workstream focussed on streamlining the recruitment process and retention incentives to demonstrate to existing foster carers how they are valued by the council. One initiative is to develop a foster carer portal to facilitate easy

access to information and training. This group continues to meet and reports regularly to the Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To approve the annual Fostering Agency report and Statement of Purpose.

Reason(s)

- 3.1 To comply with guidance and fostering regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.
- 3.2 To increase recruitment and retention of Derby City foster carers.

Supporting information

- 4.1 Fostering panels have a crucial role to play in the provision and monitoring of foster carers and placements for looked after children. The membership of Derby City's fostering panel complies with Guidance and Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011 for Fostering Services. The central list (regulation 23) consists of an independent chair and vice-chair, both of whom have professional experience of children placed away from their birth family and are competent at chairing complex meetings. Panels meet twice monthly or as required to ensure there is no delay in applications being presented for approval.
 - 4.1.1 Other members of the panel include a former foster carer from a different local authority, a Derby City fostering social worker representing the service with at least three years post qualifying experience, a care-experienced young person and other independent members with relevant experience related to children in care and safeguarding. Derby City's fostering panel has experienced a change in personnel as the panel chair tendered her resignation in January 2020 and the vice-chair moved across into this role. The recruitment process took slightly longer than anticipated but recruitment to a vice-chair position has now been successful.
 - 4.1.2 The panel is currently supported by a professional panel advisor (Head of Service) and also has access to a specialist adult medical advisor and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is the Service Director for Children's Integrated Services.
 - 4.1.3 Panels provide a quality assurance role to the fostering service provider, on the quality of reports and practice and development to ensure good outcomes for looked after children. The foster panel chair, vice chair, professional advisor, ADM and fostering managers meet twice a year to consider quality assurance and performance issues relating to the service and training needs of the panel members. Panel members receive an annual appraisal undertaken by the panel chair and panel advisor. Panel function receives full administration support in terms of minuting and organising the panel agenda.
 - 4.1.4 **Overall experience and ability of panel members and contribution to decision making. The independent chair of the fostering panel is required to contribute to the annual report and has provided the following summary:**

Panel members have a variety of backgrounds and a relevant mix of personal and professional work-related experience. These professional backgrounds contribute to the skill base and discussion for each case presented to panel. Where there are matters of concern or omissions in reports presented to panel, the issues are raised and discussed in an open and enabling manner. There is an atmosphere of respect towards each other and a willingness to share thoughts and experience which inform challenges, both to panel members and to social workers presenting reports.

We aim to make panel a welcoming and friendly experience for applicants coming forward to be approved and existing foster carers attending for their annual review. As panel chair I deal with a range of issues and questions that panel members raise and ensure they are relevant to the task. Panel members are respectful to social workers and foster carers, whilst still being able to challenge and ask questions. This can be a difficult balance to achieve but panel members do have the experience, skills and sensitivity to do this.

4.2 Approach of panel members to ensuring that fostering placements are appropriate and meeting the child's needs

Panel is aware of its responsibilities in its quality assurance role and always places the welfare of the child at the forefront of discussions. There is a mechanism within the service for panel's concerns to be addressed at regular meetings with managers and if specific issues arise during discussion the panel adviser will address this with the relevant service. The foster panel has an explicit role in obtaining the voice of a child to reassure themselves that the placement continues to meet the child's individual needs. The role of the panel advisor supports the panel's recommendations to the agency decision maker.

4.3 Commitments and awareness to safeguarding and confidentiality

Safeguarding is considered at all stages of the fostering process and fostering assessments are thorough and robust to ensure looked after children are placed in a safe and caring home environment.

Safeguarding is very much at the centre of panel discussions and in questions asked of social workers and foster carers attending. All applicants are expected to attend the panel to participate in the discussion regarding their application and recommendation of approval. Foster carers are expected to attend panel for their first annual review and subsequently at three-year intervals.

Between April 2019 and March 2020 there was one referral made to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) which met the threshold for further investigation. This referral related to a physical injury a child had sustained and was fully investigated with no further action by the police. All cases dealt with under LADO procedures require a full report to foster panel to consider de-registration and/or and any changes to approval status. In these situations, support and training needs are addressed.

4.4 Ability of panel members to address diversity issues

Panel members consider diversity issues in relation to each assessment report or annual review. The quality of care provided is measured against the requirement to meet the National Minimum Standards (NMS). Standard 2 – promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care – ensures that children have a positive self-view, knowledge and understanding of their background. Panel members will confidently challenge where they feel there is a lack of information or detail evidencing how foster carers are meeting the child's identity needs. Panel members are proactive in advocating for foster carers where they feel services for looked after children are not in place and recognise the importance of partnership working to ensure the holistic needs of children in care are met.

4.5 Areas of practice that influence how effectively panel can function

The central role in hearing the voice of the child can be difficult to achieve if this is not provided by the child's social worker. The supervising social worker for the foster carer is expected to include information in their report regarding the foster carers ability to continue to meet NMS. These Standards are child focussed and should address the child's progress and suitability of the foster carers to facilitate the child's care plan. The Supervising Social Worker's views are not independent of the fostering service and therefore child's social workers summary of the placement ensures a degree of independent monitoring.

- 4.5.1 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Department for Education produced temporary changes to allow additional flexibility for children's social care services to meet statutory duties whilst maintaining a clear focus on safeguarding. The guidance and changes were implemented on the 24th April 2020 and remained in place until 25th September 2020. Although certain flexibilities were offered by the amendments to the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the guidance clearly stated they should only be used when absolutely necessary. Derby City continued to operate a virtual fostering panel that remained quorate during this period and allowed applicants to take part in the panel discussion regarding the recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. Other changes allowed for an applicant's medical report to be covered by self-reporting until formal medical reports could be obtained. During COVID-19 full risk assessments were undertaken prior to any home visits to reduce any risk to a perspective foster carer or fostering household. Although the timeframe for completing carer reviews within 12 months was relaxed, Derby City continued to process annual reviews with the supervising social worker attending the virtual panel.

4.6 Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service

The full-time permanent marketing officer is based in the councils Communications Team and works closely with key staff to promote the marketing and recruitment of foster carers. The fostering marketing officer has been included in the marketing and sales workstream and coordinates all marketing activity with the service.

The marketing and sales workstream met regularly throughout the 12-month period and made a number of significant changes to our marketing approach which are contained in our new marketing strategy. There has been a major shift of focus to digital marketing including Google AdWords and Facebook.

The work undertaken by the corporate fostering team was recognised in November 2019 when they were nominated by the Corporate Communications Team and achieved the 'We're Here for Derby' award in the category 'Great People working as one team'.

4.6.1 The fostering marketing budget for 2019/20 was £19,000. Key activity areas in the marketing plan for 2019/20 have been:

- Three major targeted events held in May 2019 (Fostering Fortnight), September 2019 and February 2020
- Key message 'Change a life' used in all branding across Derby
- Advertising on Google Ads and Facebook to raise the profile of the service above external agencies
- External promotions in Derby City and surrounding areas targeting the major routes in and out of the city
- Marketing toolkits developed and distributed to all major employers and corporate partners in the city
- The fostering service supported Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender week & Derby Pride

- 4.6.2 The marketing strategy for 2017-2020 was produced with the focus on the quality of service, the needs of children as the primary concern, and meeting the needs of our foster carers. One of the action points identified by the Corporate Fostering Recruitment Board was the need for a revised marketing strategy.

A new marketing strategy has been developed for 2020-21 and will be revised on an annual basis to ensure that the marketing activity reflects the demand for foster placements. Derby City Council need to significantly reduce its current reliance on using independent fostering agencies as this offers greater value for money and would result in more children being placed within a 20-mile radius of Derby City.

The Council's marketing activity will continue to focus on three 'peaks' or campaigns. These peaks will be centred on virtual recruitment events. Between peaks marketing activity will continue to maintain a presence across the city with the content rotated and refreshed.

The focus will be on the quality of service delivery and recruitment and retention of foster carers for older children and sibling groups. Derby's marketing strategy aims to reflect the demographics and diversity of the city.

In adapting to the national pandemic our marketing activity has galvanised energy, capacity and crucially new ideas to meet the perennial challenge of foster care sufficiency.

- 4.6.3 The Payment for Skills scheme has been implemented and supports both the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The new financial package recognises the skill base and experience that foster carers develop and has allowed us to provide a package of remuneration that competes with the private sector. As a result of this we have seen a growing number of enquiries from IFA foster carers, 3 of which have now transferred to Derby City. Overall, there has been a positive response to payment for skills particularly for foster carers who had not been eligible for additional payments under the previous performance scheme.
- 4.6.4 Fostering allowances are required to be reviewed annually in line with the rate of inflation. Derby City's allowance payment rates are one of the highest across the region. DMT agreed the recommendation to implement Payment for Skills during 2019/20 but the basic weekly allowance rate was frozen. The basic weekly allowance rates for 2020/21 were increased by 1.8%.

Age of child	Weekly allowance per child 2019/20	Weekly allowance per child 2020/21
0-4	£149.51	£152.20
5-10	£170.31	£173.38
11-15	£212.02	£215.84
16-18	£257.93	£262.57

Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration and National Minimum Standards for fostering

4.7 Recruitment activity between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020

Initial Enquiries	Information Packs Sent	Initial Visits	Number of households invited to apply	Returned Applications	Approvals
304	200	118	58	37	18 Mainstream (48%) Friends & Family 5

Mainstream approvals – these are carried out under The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and allows the fostering service provider to assess any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable and meet the National Minimum Standards for fostering (NMS 13).

Friends & Family – Regulation 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations sets out arrangements for the temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer in exceptional circumstances for up to 16 weeks to allow an immediate placement and sufficient time for a foster carer approval process to be undertaken. NMS 30 allows for family and friends foster carers to receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

- 4.7.1 Of the 304 fostering enquiries, 62% were White British and the majority were between the age of 30-49 years. This is a positive change to our age profile of carers.
- 4.7.2 On-line enquiries and telephone enquiries to the fostering recruitment team account for 69% of enquiries and 18% are from face to face contact such as information events and drop-in sessions. The remaining 13% of enquiries come via email, foster carers and word of mouth. The word of mouth referral scheme allows existing foster carers to receive a £1000 bonus if the recommendation is successful.
- 4.7.3 Analysis of the 3 main targeted events during 2019/20 provided a total of 55 prospective fostering households taking the first step to find out more information on becoming a foster carer. This resulted in 39 initial visits (those who did not have initial visits did not want to take their enquiry further at that time). Following the initial visits 28 households were invited to make a formal application. 15 households decided not to take their enquiry any further and the service received 13 applications. Of these 13 completed applications 6 households have been approved, 6 households withdrew, and one assessment remains in process due to COVID. The main reasons for applicants withdrawing are due to changes in personal circumstances.

- 4.7.4 From the 304 initial enquiries 200 information packs were sent out. Information packs are not always sent out and this is often due to telephone consultations with the applicant being ruled out early (i.e. call back from fostering social worker reveal family circumstances that would prevent them from proceeding).

Reasons why enquiries have been closed at initial contact include:

- Recent relationship break-up
- Recent bereavement
- Safeguarding concerns
- Smoker and wants to care for under 5's
- No spare bedroom and wants older children
- Financial reasons
- Not the right time
- No response to follow ups

- 4.7.5 118 initial visits were conducted within this period and 58 application forms (49%) were left with the prospective applicant(s). Application forms are left with all potential households that demonstrate the capacity and willingness to commence the assessment and meet statutory regulations.
- 4.7.6 The recruitment officer tracks all enquiries and applications to the point of allocation. Of the 58 households invited to apply 37 applications were received (64%). Tracking activity was undertaken on the 21 households who did not return a completed application form. 8 households did not respond ending in the enquiry being closed down. 13 households decided it was not the right time to pursue fostering.
- 4.7.7 During 2019/20 a total of 23 households were presented at fostering panel for a recommendation of approval. 18 approvals were mainstream foster carers and 5 were family and friends carers.

- 4.7.8 There were a total of 16 withdrawn applications during this 12 month period. 15 were initiated by the applicants during stage one of the assessment process and 1 was withdrawn by the service. The most common reasons for people withdrawing from the process were due to emerging health issues or changes in personal circumstances.
- 4.7.9 **East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership: Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Foster Carer and Supported Lodging Provider Recruitment Project**

The above project is funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and led by Leicestershire County Council on behalf of the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership. The aim of the project is to address the regional shortfall of placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by recruiting foster carers and supported lodging providers across the East Midlands. The project will be undertaking online and media-based recruitment activity. The official launch of the project is 1st October 2020, this was delayed from July due to COVID-19.

In response to COVID-19, the project is moving training delivery online and has been working with Leicestershire's Learning Service in pursuit of this task. Applicants being assessed for this provision will undertake basic training with additional topics that include:

- asylum process
- child trafficking
- understanding and responding to the needs of a UASC.

4.8 Recruitment activity since April 2020

Due to COVID-19 the planned recruitment event during fostering fortnight (May) could not take place. Historically fostering fortnight has created a higher interest in fostering and the service had to quickly adapt to the use of virtual working. This led to our first virtual event on 14th July where a total of 22 households participated. In line with the new marketing strategy the focus on recruitment is sibling groups and older children.

The impact of COVID-19 on assessment work has slightly delayed approvals for mainstream assessments but there has been a significant increase in the number of friends and family assessments. Fostering work undertaken during the early months of lockdown created some challenges and certain processes have taken longer such as the role out of suitable IT equipment for staff who were working from home, virtual assessment visits, medical assessment reports and digital training being made available to applicants. Panel members have been flexible and contributed to maintaining all panel functions and recommendations for the Agency Decision Maker.

Since 1st April 2020 the service has approved 9 new households - 7 mainstream and 2 Family and Friends carers. The mainstream approval categories are shown in the table below. The family and friends approvals provided placements for 3 looked after children.

Approval categories
Short-term, 1 child, age 0-2
Short-term, 1 child or 2 if siblings, age 5-10
Short-term/long-term, 3 children, age 11-18 (IFA transfer)
Short-term/long-term, 2 children, age 2-8
Respite/Emergency, 1 child age 4-8
Short-breaks age 5-18 (specific match)
Permanent placement for 1 child (IFA transfer)

- 4.8.1 As of the end of September 2020 there are 31 fostering assessments being undertaken. 19 assessments are mainstream and 12 are family and friends. If all applications are successful, this would bring a total of 26 mainstream approvals for the year 2020/21. The family and friends approvals currently being assessed under regulation 24 are providing placements for 19 looked after children.

Mainstream approvals since April 2020	7
Mainstream assessments currently being undertaken	19
Potential forecast for 2020/21	26

Family & Friends approvals since April 2020	2
Family & Friends assessments currently being undertaken	12
Potential forecast for 2020/21	14

4.9 **De-Registrations of fostering households:**

There were a total of 21 de-registrations presented at panel between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020. The majority of de-registrations were due to carers making the decision to retire due to changes in life circumstances or health.

4.9.1 Out of the 21 de-registrations:

- 3 households expressed a wish to apply for Special Guardianship Orders and subsequently resigned from fostering – this is a good permanency outcome for children
- 3 of the de-registrations were from family and friends carers who no longer had a child in placement
- 10 resignations were due to foster carers retiring from the role
- 5 households - registration ceased due to young person transferring to a 'staying put' arrangement – another good outcome for young people leaving care

- 4.10 The Derby Foster Carers Association (FCA) has gone from strength to strength in the last twelve months. Prior to COVID-19 the number of activities and events the association organised has continued to grow, as has the number of fostering carers participating.

Coffee mornings have been held weekly at Nunsfield House to which all Derby City Foster Carers are invited to attend. There has been a particularly positive attendance by new foster carers, who have benefited from the opportunity to meet and network with other carers.

The FCA has in addition arranged social outings to Bridlington, Laser Quest and Twin Lakes, all of which have been free for foster carers and their families to attend. A Christmas Party for all carers and children was held at the Rolls Royce Social Club in December, alongside a Pizza and Lego Party which took place alongside the FCA annual general meeting in February.

The FCA committee has been successful in fundraising from charitable organisations. This has served to increase their resources, making a significant contribution to being able to organise events like the Christmas party.

FCA members have continued to work very effectively with the fostering teams and the council more widely. 5 committee members have taken part in corporate fostering workstreams, relating to the marketing strategy and the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

The fostering support team manager has been invited to and attend monthly FCA committee meetings, where a solution focussed approach has served to overcome challenges and develop practice. FCA members have contributed to the development of other foster carers through their contribution to the planning and delivery of foster carer support groups, facilitating induction training and mentoring new carers

The contribution of the FCA and its members over the past year has been invaluable to the overall development and improvement of the fostering service. There is every confidence this will continue going forward into the next year.

Public/stakeholder engagement

- 5.1 Derby City Council undertook a Foster Carer Survey in February 2020. An analysis of the results was coordinated by the Communications and Consultation team and circulated to fostering households.

Other options

- 6.1 Not applicable

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. A budget increase in 2020-21 allowed fostering allowances to be up rated to keep pace with the recommended national minimum rate.

Any increase in the shortfall of in-house placements has a direct financial effect due to the much higher placement costs in the independent sector. It is therefore essential to keep pace with marketplace developments regarding the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

In the event of an appeal to the IRM – full name the cost falls on the fostering service provider. The fee is £2500 for each case referred to the IRM. There have been no cases referred to the IRM during 2019/20.

Legal implications

- 8.1 The fostering function of the Council is regulated by the 1989 Children Act and the Associated Fostering Regulations, guidance and the minimum standards published in 2011.

Other significant implications

- 9.1 None.

Personnel

- 10.1 The service is managed by a Head of Service for Fostering. There are three full time fostering team manager posts and 16 FTE social workers who carry out the full range of statutory regulations associated with fostering activity.

The Head of Service and team managers maintain a close working relationship with the workforce learning and development training commissioning group. This group coordinates the post approval training programme, e-learning and any specialist training from an external provider for approved foster carers. The training programme is reviewed annually and has been developed to meet the training requirements to allow foster carers to progress within the payment for skills programme.

The recruitment and assessment team are supported by one full time recruitment officer to ensure the early stages of recruitment activity receive a prompt response and data tracking is provided for the team manager to monitor assessment timescales.

The fostering service is also supported by one full time casework support officer.

Equalities Impact

- 11.1 The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in all aspects of service delivery to ensure children's needs are appropriately met. Fostering Panel monitors the quality of

care being provided by the foster carer and the child focussed standards NMS 1 - 12 underpin the quality of placements being provided.

Health and Safety

- 12.1 This is considered at all stages of the recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of foster carers. All the managers in the service have completed mandatory Health and Safety training. Fostering panel have a quality assurance role to ensure all fostering households meet the required national minimum standards for fostering (NMS 6 and 10).

Environmental Sustainability

- 13.1 None arising from this report.

Property and Asset Management

- 14.1 None arising from this report.

Risk Management

- 15.1 Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 16.1 Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through business plans and individual performance monitoring throughout the service.
- Continue to review our fostering marketing strategy to achieve an overall increase in fostering households
 - Regularly consult with our foster carers to improve the service offer
 - To increase approved households for older children and siblings

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal Finance Service Director(s) Report sponsor	Suanne Lim, Service Director, Childrens Integrated Services People Services Directorate. 01332 642641 suanne.lim@derby.gov.uk	02.10.20
Other(s)		

For more information contact:	Sally Penrose, Head of Service Fostering 01332 6438817 sally.penrose@derby.gov.uk
Background papers:	
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Appendix 2 – Marketing Strategy 2020