



Derby City Council

**CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE**  
**23 February 2016**

**ITEM 13**

Report of the Acting Strategic Director for  
Children and Young People

**Fostering Service Report**

**SUMMARY**

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

(Standard 25.7)

The Fostering Agency is required to produce a Statement of Purpose which is updated once a year. The current Statement of Purpose was presented to Corporate Parenting Committee on the 01.12.15.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 To note the contents and approve the Fostering Agency report.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 To comply with guidance and regulations and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The membership of the fostering panel complies with Guidance and Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. It

consists of an independent chair and vice-chair, a health service representative, a foster carer and fostering social worker, a care-experienced young person and other independent members with relevant experience related to CiC (Children in Care) and safeguarding. The panel is supported by an independent professional advisor and also has access to medical and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption. A new independent panel chair took up her post in January 2015.

The panel chair, professional advisor and team managers meet twice a year to consider quality and performance issues relating to the service and training needs of the panel members. Panel members receive an annual appraisal.

4.2 The Family Values Project work in conjunction with iMPower was completed in October 2015. The final handover report summarised the work undertaken below:

- A focus on increasing the capacity and efficiency of the Fostering Service
- Improving time scales for the fostering assessment process
- To improve the experience of prospective and existing foster carers
- To develop a more targeted approach to marketing recruitment initiatives
- To reduce spend on Independent Fostering Agency placements

The project commenced with a diagnostic overview of the service which took place between August and November 2014. This allowed for full engagement with staff, the marketing and communications team and foster carers through a series of workshops, surveys and focus groups. The Family Values model approach has been integral to facilitating the desired changes to our marketing and recruitment strategy.

Between November 2014 and February 2015 three work streams were created to focus on recruitment methods and targets, improving systems relating to assessment time scales and finally improve the provision of support and supervision to existing foster carers. Support to the service was provided by iMPower between March –October 2015 to deliver the three action plans with the engagement of our existing foster carers to support recruitment activity. Our focus on the 'word of mouth campaigns' has allowed the service to develop the links that our existing foster carers have within their community, faith groups, schools etc. The initial call handling for enquires was transferred to the fostering recruitment team from Derby Direct in September 2015 on a six month pilot. This is to ensure that callers can speak to someone with fostering knowledge and expertise at the first point of contact with the Council and is shortly due for review.

Marketing materials and the Derby City Council website have been updated and fostering information sessions now take place in the Council House, local venues and neighbouring authorities to attract potential applicants within a 20 mile radius of the city. In conjunction with the Foster Carer Association (FCA) the service consulted on the development of providing regular support group meetings. The FCA welcomed this opportunity and nominated existing foster

carers to support the organisation and development of the groups which facilitate peer network support for our carers and improve communication levels with fostering social workers on mutually identified topics.

Overall the impact on the service has been positive and there has been an increase in Fostering enquires since June 2015. These enquires are monitored with the aim of improving the conversion of enquiry to application and scrutiny is ongoing.

- 4.3 The three year Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and the Marketing Action Plan have been implemented since January 2014. The Marketing Action Plan is a rolling programme of events coordinated with the fostering service via monthly marketing meetings. This has reinforced a more targeted approach identifying local community groups via “word of mouth” recruitment campaigns as well as a more generalised marketing approach using all forms of media. This model encourages our existing foster carers to participate more fully in recruitment events that attract people with a likeminded value base.
- 4.4 Between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 the fostering service received 224 fostering enquires and sent out 201 information packs. 46 initial visits were undertaken and from these 19 fostering applications were received. At the end of December 2015 15 fostering assessments were allocated. Approvals for the year are lower than previous years with a total of 4 households approved as main stream foster carers and 5 households approved as Friends and Family carers. Figures for December 2015 show there were a total of 106 approved fostering households providing a range of time limited, permanent and respite care compared to 105 in 2014 and 113 in 2013. The service was supporting 23 approved Friends and Family carers compared to 17 in 2014 and 27 in 2013. There are currently 17 short-break/respite carers.

#### Historical Enquiries Comparison 2011 - 2014

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	TOTAL - 2011 to 2014
January	0	21	14	30	34	22	41	127
February	0	0	8	16	32	35	29	112
March	0	0	20	11	35	30	72	148
April		0	5	13	20	42	28	103
May		0	20	27	39	42	62	170
June		0	33	24	33	24	26	107
July		0	28	28	20	31	18	97
August		0	11	11	16	21	24	72
September		0	23	9	19	26	52	106
October		0	19	10	14	20	44	88
November		0	25	8	20	22	34	84
December		0	18	14	17	17	23	71
	0	21	224	201	299	332	453	1285

- 4.5 The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team have undergone recent staffing changes which has allowed for additional hours to be recruited to the team. The permanent team manager post is currently being recruited to and an agency team manager is covering the intervening period. The team is fully staffed with 7 FTE social workers and is able to call on social workers across the fostering and adoption service to provide additional capacity for assessments when required.
- 4.6 The new post of a Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Officer funded through the Adoption Reform Grant in 2014 has been confirmed as permanent. This appointment has improved our initial response to enquiries; produced better performance information reports and supports marketing and recruitment events. A Topic Review was held in November 2015 to provide an overview of the Family Value project work completed with IMPOWER and consider recruitment and assessment performance. Councillors were able to meet with a focus group of staff and foster carers and the opportunity to visit an Independent Fostering Agency. A full report will be received by Inspiring Children and Young People Scrutiny Board.
- 4.7 There have been 15 complaints against foster carers during this period. Five households were subject to formal LADO investigations resulting in one resignation from foster carer and four investigations were unsubstantiated. There have been no appeals in 2015 to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism.
- 4.8 Fostering allowances are being reviewed for 2016-17 to keep comparable to the Fostering Network recommended rates and above the national minimum rate. This is to ensure the service remains competitive and provides value for money.
- 4.9 The Derby Foster Carers Association has continued to develop since it launched three years ago. The AGM is due to take place on the 27.02.16 with the proposal that the existing committee members retain their posts. Social activities are organised and the service supports these events for carers and children. Key committee members periodically meet with the Head of Service to share social work practice issues and changes taking place in the service.

<b>OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED</b>
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5.1 Not applicable

**This report has been approved by the following officers:**

<b>Legal officer</b> <b>Financial officer</b> <b>Human Resources officer</b> <b>Estates/Property officer</b> <b>Service Director(s)</b>  <b>Other(s)</b>	Hazel Lymbery Director of Specialist Services 01332 642669 hazel.lymbery@derby.gov.uk
<b>For more information contact:</b> <b>Background papers:</b> <b>List of appendices:</b>	Sally Penrose 01332 6438817 sally.penrose@derby.gov.uk  Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Appendix 1 – Implications

## IMPLICATIONS

### Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. A budget increase in 2015-16 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 increase the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

In the event of an appeal to the IRM the cost falls on the fostering service provider. The fee is around £2500 for each case.

### Legal

- 2.1 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.

### Personnel

- 3.1 The service became managed by a Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption in July 2015 when the Deputy Head of Service post was deleted. There are three full time Fostering team managers and 16.6 FTE social workers who carry out the full range of fostering activities. One full time Adoption team manager with a team of 7.5 FTE social workers and a full time manager for the Therapeutic Service for LAC and Adopted children who manages the Adoption support team (3.5 FTE) and Leopold Street. The service recruited and appointed two full time casework support officer posts in December 2015 which adds further capacity to the business support requirements related to the service.

### Equalities Impact

- 4.1 The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in relation to children being placed and for adults who apply to become foster carers. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and further efforts will be made this year to recruit carers from ethnic minority communities and carers for children with disabilities.

### Health and Safety

- 5.1 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.

## **Environmental Sustainability**

6.1 None arising from this report

## **Property and Asset Management**

7.1 None arising from this report

## **Risk Management**

8.1 Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

## **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

- 9.1 Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through business plans and individual performance plans throughout the service. The Fostering and Adoption Service supports the Council priorities of :
- Inspiring start in life
  - Inspiring start in life by improving educational outcomes
  - Inspiring working life by improving skills and creating jobs