

Report sponsor: Suanne Lim Director Early Help  
and Children's Social Care  
Report author: Judy Levitt (DHOS fostering)

## **Fostering recruitment update report**

### **Purpose**

- 1.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range a foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children.  
  
Standard 13.
- 1.2 The Pathway to Approval workstream has focussed on streamlining the recruitment process and retention incentives to demonstrate and reinforce to existing foster carers, how they are valued by the Council. A LEAN report continues to be developed and one initiative is to develop a foster carer portal to facilitate easy access for our foster carers to information, policies and training

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 To update the Corporate parenting board on fostering recruitment and marketing strategies (From the period of April 2021 to the end of September 2021 (Quarters 1 and 2)

### **Reason**

- 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 A new marketing strategy was developed for 2021-22 and will be revised on an annual basis to ensure that the marketing activity reflects the demand for foster placements. (See appendix 1)

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 fostering marketing budget for 2020/21 was £27,000. Key activity areas in the marketing plan for 2020/21 are:
- Four targeted events held in July, September and November 2021 and February 2022. Since Sept 2021, events will be held face to face.
- New campaign 'I am, I can' launched early 2021 and used in 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

#### 4.2 Our marketing objectives are to:

- Increase enquiries by 25% achieving a total of 375 by March 2022
- Increase our conversion rate from enquiry to a completed initial visit to 50%, by generating high quality marketing qualified leads (event booking/visit bookings)
- Attract 10% of total enquiries specifically for children and young people with complex needs, by targeting healthcare/police professionals
- Attract 30% of total enquiries for children ages 10-15

#### 4.3 Our marketing activity will focus around four 'peaks' or campaigns to recruit more foster carers. These peaks will be centred on recruitment events and other major activities which will require full participation by all Fostering colleagues. Post Covid, we continue to maximise opportunities for applications from people who have had a change in circumstance, focus and employment.

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

#### 4.4 The Council are working on achieving a Foster Friendly status, which will offer better leave policies and perks for employees of the Council to encourage them to consider fostering, alongside flexible working. Once the policy is in place, this will be used in all of our branding and marketing. The next stages after the new status has been rolled out, will be to reach out to all local businesses to encourage them to become Foster Friendly and help us promote fostering within their business. We are also working in collaboration with D2N2, so that all four councils have Foster Friendly status and we will then use this in marketing a new campaign to 'Foster For Your Council.'

- 4.5 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, and since April 2021 we have assessed and approved 4 new carers, another foster carer transferred from another local authority after moving to the area, and we have 3 more foster carers currently being assessed from IFA's. Overall, there has been a positive response from our carers to payment for skills particularly for foster carers who had not been eligible for additional payments under the previous performance scheme.
- 4.6 We have also developed and implemented a new in house Parent and Child scheme, which has involved training our existing carers in order to extend their approval range. Going forward this will be a new approval category for new applications and the payment for this scheme will sit outside of the Payment for Skills structure. So far this has attracted 8 carers to increasing their approval range and we are hopeful that this will be a significant financial saving for the Council in the next 6 months.
- 4.7 Recruitment activity between 1st April 2021 and 30th Sept 2021

<b>Initial Enquiries</b>	<b>Information Packs Sent</b>	<b>Initial Visits</b>	<b>Number of households invited to apply</b>	<b>Returned Applications</b>	<b>Approvals</b>
78	155	18	13	10	9 mainstream 6 Family & Friends

The period from April to August was very quiet this year and this pattern was reflected nationwide. Since September there has been a slight increase in enquiries. Since April, out of the 78 fostering enquiries, 60% were White British and the majority were between the age of 25-49 years. The average age was 41. This is a positive change to the demographic profile of our carers.

- 4.8 Analysis of the 2 targeted events so far this year provided a total of 74 prospective fostering households taking the first step to find out more information on becoming a foster carer. This resulted in 21 initial visits (those who did not have initial visits did not want to take their enquiry further at that time). Following the initial visits 14 households were invited to make a formal application. 5 households decided not to take their enquiry any further and the service received 9 applications.

- 4.9 22 From the 273 initial enquiries 155 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
- 4.10 18 initial visits were conducted within this period and 13 application forms (72%) 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.
- 4.11 From July to end of Sept we were without a recruitment officer, and this has had an impact on the tracking of enquiries, however, we now have our new officer in post who will track all enquiries and applications to the point of allocation. Of the 13 households invited to apply 10 applications were received (77%). Tracking activity was undertaken on the 3 households who did not return a completed application form. One household was waiting for a house move before applying, one household decided to stay with their current fostering agency and was decided not to apply due to ill health

#### 4.12 **Approval activity since April 2021**

Between 1 April to September 30 2021, there were 15 approvals, 9 mainstream and six Family and Friends carers. The categories for approvals were as follows:

<b>Approval categories</b>
Short -term, not permanent: 6
Short term & Emergency / Short Breaks: 3
Family and Friends: 6

- 4.13 As of the end of Sept 2021 there are 31 fostering assessments being undertaken. 18 assessments are mainstream and 7 are family and friends. The family and friends approvals currently being assessed under regulation 24 are providing placements for 16 looked after children. It is extremely difficult to predict the number of F&F assessments, but on average we receive several requests each month, and some of these will not become successful foster placements but may transfer to SGO assessments, which in the current F&F team will remain with the same assessor.

#### 4.14 **De-Registrations of fostering households:**

Since 1st April 2021 there were a total of six mainstream carer de-registrations presented at panel. This is lower than the same point in the previous year where we had eight by 30th September.

#### 4.15 Out of the six mainstream carer de-registrations:

Two were due to retirement. One carer had 18 years of service whilst the other carer had 8 years of service.

- One was due to health issues
- Three were due to a change in circumstances.

### **Public/stakeholder engagement**

- 5.1 Derby City Council undertook a Foster Carer Survey in July 2021. We are awaiting the final analysis of the results and this will be shared with fostering households at a coffee morning on 8<sup>th</sup> October. The fostering service will develop an action plan as a result of the fostering survey which will be shared across departments in the Council. The survey specifically focused on carers views of how they have been supported during the pandemic.

### **Other options**

- 6.1 N/A

Financial and value for money issues

- 7.1 The target set, is for a saving of £400,000 in the financial year, deliverable from an increase in the recruitment of in-house foster carers and reduction in the use of Independent Fostering Agencies. (the £400,000 equates to the savings based on avoidance of 20 IFA placements.) This can also be achieved by better use of existing foster carers, and improved sufficiency, achieved by wider approval ranges, increases in age categories, numbers of children placed and parent and child placements.

- 7.2 To date in quarters 1 and 2 we have made the following savings:

Q1: 8 step down placements made from IFA to in house placements

Q2: 2 step down placements made from IFA to in house placement, making an overall saving of £247,788 from those 10 placements.

In addition, in Q1&2, there were a further 8 placements made with in house carers for children with complex needs, older children or sibling groups, who would normally be placed in IFA placements. These 8 placements, added to the savings by another £124,640.

The total savings up to the end of September 2021, were £372,428, meaning that we are ahead of target at this point in the year.

## 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.

## Climate implications

- 9.1 None

## Other significant implications

- 10.1 None

This report has been approved by the following people:

Role	Name	Date of sign-off
Legal Finance Service Director(s) Report sponsor Other(s)	Suanne Lim, Director Early Help & Children's Social Care	25 October 2021

Background papers: List of appendices:	Appendix 1 - Fostering recruitment plan 2021-22 Appendix 2 - Marketing Strategy 2020
---	---