

## **Fostering Agency Report**

### **SUMMARY**

- 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 September 2016. The Statement of Purpose has been updated for 2017 and is attached as appendix 2. The marketing Strategy for 2017-2020 is attached as appendix 3.

This report covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 To approve the Fostering Agency report and Marketing Strategy

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 To comply with guidance and regulations and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.
- 3.2 To increase availability and placement range of in house foster placements

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **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**

- 4.1 Fostering panels have a crucial role to play in the provision and monitoring of foster care for 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, a health service representative, a foster carer from a different local authority, a 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. The panel is currently supported by an independent professional advisor and also has access to a specialist adult medical advisor and legal advice as required. The fostering panel advisor post is currently being recruited to by the service at a senior practitioner grade which is commensurate to the professional advisor for the Adoption Panel. This will replace the independent professional advisor and bring the post under the direct line management of the Head of Service. It is a statutory post that requires a more substantial QA role and liaison with team managers to manage the panel agenda, quality of reports and panel minutes. The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption.

The foster panel chair, professional advisor 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. The panel chair and ADM were interviewed about their respective roles by Ofsted inspectors in March 2017. The overall judgement for Looked After Children which included the fostering service was "good"

- 4.2 Between July 2016 and June 2017 there were four referrals made to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) three of which met the threshold for further investigation. Referrals came under the category of either physical/sexual abuse and following investigation all three cases were unsubstantiated. All cases dealt with under LADO procedures require a full report to foster panel to consider any changes to approval status, support and training needs. There has been one appeal in 2017 to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism involving a Friends and Family foster carer. The ADM upheld the decision to deregister.

### **Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months**

- 4.3 The fostering and adoption marketing budget for 16/17 was £26,306.00. This remains unchanged for 2017/18 and the greater proportion is targeted at fostering recruitment. Key activity areas are the council tax leaflet drop, radio campaigns, fostering fortnight, LGBT week, and a recent collaboration of local authorities across the East and West Midlands to produce a recruitment film titled Giants. A new 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.

Three key selling points and marketing messages contained in the strategy are:

- “*Local homes for local children*” as the Council wishes to move away from placing children with families in other cities and regions.
- Foster carers are “*part of an important professional team*”. In 2016 the State of the Nations Foster Care research report revealed that foster carers do not feel valued as professionals.
- The assurance that “*we are there for you*”. The 2016 research revealed that foster carers want improved communication and support from childrens social workers and the fostering service.

Underpinning the strategy will be the quality and appropriateness of the website which will be a purpose-built window with automated functions to increase initial on line enquiries and overall conversion rates. The current website does not adequately support the Council’s Fostering business requirements and puts the service at a distinct disadvantage when compared to its 48 Independent Fostering Agency competitors in Derby. Within the strategic marketing plan our priority has been to evaluate the current website and make significant improvements so that it is fit for purpose by November 2017.

Social media has been scheduled to gain the maximum exposure with regular twitter and facebook posts going out now. The medium term plan is to have our own Facebook page for fostering, this will be the next focus after the website is completed.

The Fostering Service has also undertaken a research project with Workforce Learning and Development planning to introduce a payment for skills structure for foster carers. This will involve a financial review of our current fee payment scheme. Consideration will be given to linking foster care training and development to financial remuneration to aid transparency for our existing carers and career development to attract new carers to join the local authority.

- 4.4A new fostering and adoption marketing officer joined the council in May 2017. The full time permanent marketing officer is based in the council’s Communications Team and works closely with key staff in the Fostering and Adoption service. Regular marketing meetings are held to plan for the main recruitment events during the year. In addition to keep abreast of regional activity the marketing

officer attends regional recruitment forums to share new marketing initiatives. Our main recruitment events are supported by Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Safeguarding.

- 4.5 During the 12 month period between July 2016 and June 2017 the fostering service received 217 fostering enquiries 69% of which were white british enquiries (fig.1) from the predominate age bands being between 30-59yrs (fig.2). On line enquiries and telephone enquiries account for 67% with 13% of enquiries coming from people attending events (fig.3). Of the 217 initial enquiries 183 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 reveals no spare bedroom for a child). 69 enquiry forms were returned and 59 initial visits were undertaken (fig.4).

As a result of the 59 initial visits conducted within the past 12 months, 32 application forms were left with the prospective foster carer(s). Applications forms are only left when there is some indication from the initial visit that the applicant(s) has the capacity to gain a positive recommendation at fostering panel. With regards to the 32 applications left, 20 completed application forms were returned back to the Fostering Service (62.5%). The majority of these were returned within 20 days of the form being left with them to consider their options.

5 of the applications that we received from prospective carers resulted in deselection. Below are the reasons stated:

- \* LA could not continue after negative references were received
- \* Applicants withdrew themselves from the process citing personal reasons
- \* Applicants withdrew due to complications re citizenship/getting info from other countries
- \* Withdrawn by department due to information regarding physical chastisement
- \* Withdrew by department regarding concerns over discriminatory views

During the 12 month period between July 2016 and June 2017 there were 15 approvals at fostering panel. Seven of the approvals were family and friends carers and eight of the approvals were mainstream approvals (fig.5). Since June 2017 there have been 3 more approvals of friends and family carers and 2 more approvals of mainstream applicants.

There are currently 10 mainstream fostering assessments being undertaken. 8 of the assessments are due to be presented at panel over the next 6 months. With regards to the 2 that are not expected to progress within this time period, 1 is on hold due to bereavement and the other is likely to withdraw on medical grounds.

At this point in time we are on course to approve 12 new mainstream carers over the period of the current financial year. We are also hoping that our upcoming recruitment event, enhancements to the website and media coverage will allow us to expand on existing enquiries and conversion rates.

We currently have 1 Reg 24 carer in assessment who is expected to be at panel by December 2017. As noted we have already approved 4 sets of family and friends carers this financial year. Together these family placements take care of 8 looked after children reducing the demand on mainstream “in house carers” and commissioned IFA placements. Two of these placements are sibling groups.

Deregistrations over the same 12 month period comprised of 4 Friends and Family carers 3 of which obtained SGO’s and 1 via the Independent Review Mechanism.

Two foster families expressed a wish to adopt the children in placement and consequently resigned from their fostering role after successfully being approved to adopt. 2 mainstream households tendered their resignation due to changes in family circumstances.

There has been an increase in the number of Staying Put arrangements agreed with Derby City foster carers. Out of 14 young people remaining with their former carer 5 households ceased to foster.

4.6 The fostering service underwent significant staffing changes during the period July 2016 – June 2017. This is due to a natural turnover of staff retiring and the appointment of five new social workers across the recruitment and support teams. Two of the three team managers joined the service in the later half of last year which has provided a consistent approach and management stability to drive improvement in service delivery. The post of a Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Officer continues to support our response to enquiries, oversight of the assessment timescales and provides essential data for the statutory data returns. The post ensures a positive link with the performance and intelligence team and coordination of the marketing activity.

4.7 Fostering allowances have been reviewed and approved for 2017-18 with an agreed uplift of 1.80%. The forecast increase of £26,700 can be contained within the total cost centre budget for Fostering Allowances in 2017-18.

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

4.8 Ofsted made a total of eleven recommendations one of which is to “prioritise the recruitment and commissioning of a variety of local foster carers to provide sufficient capacity to best meet the needs of children looked after in Derby”. The council has therefore agreed to an initial scoping exercise to explore alternative models of delivering the fostering service. It is envisaged that the

undertaking of soft market testing will be completed over the next 6-9 month via the appointment of a project manager based in the Children's Commissioning Team. The soft market testing will establish whether there are financial benefits for the council to contract out the service via a commissioning or partnership arrangement within the voluntary or private sector. The DfE's national fostering stocktake should help to highlight the challenges currently facing the system. One area of focus will be to consider what improvements could be made to the way that fostering provision is commissioned, delivered, regulated and inspected to improve outcomes and value for money.

- 4.9 The Derby Foster Carers Association has continued to develop since it originally launched in 2013 . The AGM took place in the February 2017 with the proposal that the existing committee members retain their posts. Social events are organised by the FCA committee and are well attended by foster carers and children. The FCA has had three new members join the committee this year and has also seen an increase in charitable donations. The council continues to provide funding toward the cost of developing the work that the FCA undertakes. Key committee members periodically meet with fostering team managers to share social work practice issues and changes taking place in the service. The association is invited to co facilitate the running of support groups and is included in the new induction programme for newly approved foster carers.

## OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 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>	Suanne Lim Service Director, Childrens Integrated Services People Services Directorate. 01332 642641 suanne.lim@derby.gov.uk
<b>For more information contact:</b> <b>Background papers:</b> <b>List of appendices:</b>	Sally Penrose Head of Fostering and Adoption 01332 6438817 sally.penrose@derby.gov.uk  Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 –Fostering Recruitment Market and Strategy Plan 2017 -2020 Appendix 3 – Derby City Council Fostering Service – Statement of purpose: why are we here and what we will do

<b>IMPLICATIONS</b>
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## **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 2017-18 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 market place developments regarding the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The council has agreed to undertake a feasibility exercise and commence a period of soft market testing to explore alternative models of delivering the service with potential providers.

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

## **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 is managed by a Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption. There are three full time fostering team managers and 16.6 FTE social workers who carry out the full range of statutory regulations associated with fostering activity. The adoption service has one full time adoption team manager with a team of 9.5 FTE social workers. This post is currently responsible for piloting the Children's Adoption Permanence team ( within the scope of the RAA). Adoption support team has a 0.5hr team manager with 2.6 FTE social workers and a 0.5 Independent worker for birth families.

The fostering and adoption teams maintain close working relationships with the Keep to ensure the therapeutic needs of children and carers are met. The service is supported by two full time casework support officer posts, one recruitment officer and one Letterbox co ordinator.

## **IT**

4.1

None arising from this report.

## **Equalities Impact**

5.1

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**

6.1

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**

7.1

None arising from this report

## **Property and Asset Management**

8.1

None arising from this report

## **Risk Management and Safeguarding**

9.1

Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

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

10.1

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:

- Delivering good quality services that protect Derby's vulnerable children



- Develop and deliver services that are driven by the voices of children, young people and their carers
- Make the best use of resources available to manage demand and meet required budget savings-making the most of our assets.
- Enabling individuals and communities

## Foster carer recruitment analysis

**Figure 1. Ethnicity of lead foster carer**

Number of enquiries	2016-17												2017-18				12 month total	%
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Q2 Total	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q3 Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4 Total	Apr	May	June	Q1 Total		
Asian or Asian British	2	3	3	8	3	1	0	4	1	1	3	5	2	1	1	4	21	10%
Black or Black British	2	1	4	7	2	1	1	4	4	2	0	6	0	2	4	6	23	11%
Dual Heritage	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	6	3%
Chinese	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0%
White – Other	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1%
White – British	10	12	18	40	13	23	4	40	16	11	14	41	10	10	8	28	149	69%
Any other ethnic group	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	4	2	0	0	2	1	2	0	3	10	5%
Not yet obtained	1	1	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100%</b>

69% of all enquiries came from people with a White British ethnicity, the next highest were from people with a Black or Black British ethnicity (11%) closed followed by Asian or Asian British ethnicities (10%).

The number of foster carer enquiries dropped during the first three months of 2017-18 with 44 enquiries compared to the previous nine months. We are currently receiving approx. 18 enquiries each month. The highest volume of enquiries was seen in September 2016 with 28 enquiries, the lowest month was December 2016 with just 6 enquiries.

Over the past 12 months 81% of enquiries resulted in an information pack being sent out to the prospective foster carer. After the information pack has been sent out to a prospective carer, a number of "chase" letters are sent out to the enquirer to see if they are still interested or need any support. Unfortunately a lot of enquiries result in No Further Action. Often the reason for this is that we get no response from enquirers following our initial contact. Other reasons include not having a spare bedroom, financial constraints and wrong timing.

**Figure 2. Age group of lead foster carer**

Number of enquiries	2016-17												2017-18				12 month total	%
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Q2 Total	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q3 Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4 Total	Apr	May	June	Q1 Total		
Aged 29 and under	1	5	2	8	3	7	2	12	2	0	4	6	1	3	3	7	33	15%
Aged 30 to 39	3	4	5	12	7	3	1	11	4	3	8	15	3	4	3	10	48	22%
Aged 40 to 49	7	3	8	18	4	6	2	12	7	3	3	13	3	5	3	11	54	25%
Aged 50 to 59	3	1	9	13	5	2	1	8	10	6	3	19	3	2	5	10	50	23%
Aged 60 to 69	0	2	3	5	0	6	0	6	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	2	15	7%
70 or over	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1%
Not yet obtained	4	2	1	7	1	2	0	3	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	4	15	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of foster carer enquiries come from people aged between 40 and 49 (25%) followed by those aged 50 to 59 (23%). We also have a high percentage of enquiries from those aged 29 and under (15%). Derby also received 17 enquiries from people aged 60 and over (8%).

**Figure 3. Source of Enquiry**

Number of enquiries	2016-17												2017-18				12 month total	%
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Q2 Total	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q3 Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4 Total	Apr	May	June	Q1 Total		
Lagan – online enquiry	9	8	5	22	10	8	3	21	5	4	8	17	6	8	4	18	78	36%
Fostering Open Day/Event/Info session	3	0	3	6	0	9	0	9	10	2	0	12	0	0	2	2	29	13%
Drop-in session/In person at CH	3	2	1	6	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	11	5%
DCC website 'Request a call back'	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	1%
Social Worker	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	3	1%
Telephone enquiry	3	3	11	17	7	7	2	16	4	8	7	19	4	6	6	16	68	31%
Email to Fostering Duty	0	2	6	8	2	0	0	2	3	0	1	4	2	0	0	2	16	7%
Other	0	0	2	2	1	2	0	3	2	0	0	2	0	1	1	2	9	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of all foster carer enquiries are logged through Lagan as an online enquiry (36%) followed by telephone enquiries (31%). 29 enquiries were as a result of a Fostering Open Day / Event / Information Session (13%). A small number of enquiries were made after attending a drop in session within the council house (5%).

The main source of enquiries are from people who have enquired previously or are already fostering with an IFA . Also a large number have been "thinking about fostering for a while".

**Figure 4. Breakdown of enquiries**

Number of enquiries	Packs sent	Initial visits	Applications received	Assessments started	Approved	Withdrawn from process	Assesments on hold	Current assessments
217	183	59	20	17	2	5	2	8

**Figure 5. Mainstream and Family and Friend (Reg 24) Approvals**

Number of approvals	2016-17												2017-18				12 month total	%
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Q2 Total	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q3 Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q4 Total	Apr	May	June	Q1 Total		
Mainstream	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	5	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	8	53%
Reg 24	0	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	2	7	47%

Total	0	1	1	2	1	3	2	6	0	2	1	3	1	2	1	4	15	100%
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