

Report Sponsor: Andy Smith Strategic  
Director of People's Services  
Report Author: Suanne Lim Director Early  
Help and Children's Social Care

## **Annual Fostering 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 2020. The Statement of Purpose has been updated for 2021 and is attached as appendix 1.

This report covers the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

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 was established in 2018 to ensure there was a Council wide adoption and ownership of Fostering as Corporate Parent and that Fostering became a Council priority. Over the last 2 years this has now become embedded and improved outcomes can be demonstrated, with more carers approved, a larger number of bedspaces, and a reduction in our reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements.

As of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, it was agreed that management of the Fostering Service could safely transfer reporting from a strategic level into the wider Children and Young

People Demand Management Board, which still has the lead member and DCS oversight on it.

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.

This 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.

### **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.
- 4.2 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 is currently being recruited, and other independent members with relevant experience related to children in care and safeguarding. Derby City's Fostering Panel has had a new chair person in position over the last year and has also appointed a new vice chair.
- 4.3 The panel is currently supported by a professional Panel Advisor who was previously the Head of Service, and also has access to a Specialist Adult Medical Advisor and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) was the Service Director

for Children's Integrated Services until January 2021 when the newly appointed Deputy Head of Fostering Service, took over this position.

- 4.4 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, Agency Decision Maker (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.
- 4.5 **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.

In the last year all panel members have appreciated the need to work virtually but prefer to meet in person and there is a loss of the informal network. Virtual Panels have facilitated all statutory panel functions to continue. Approved carers have been supported to attend virtually for their first annual review or as required if practice issues need addressing. Applicants are attending Panel and this includes regulation 24 assessments (Friend and Family assessments where children are already in placement)

The Panel has benefited from the appointment of a new Vice Chair, and also since January a professional Panel Advisor who can solely concentrate on this role. The previous Head of Service had been covering this role in addition to her other duties. Panel member appraisals have been completed, as has specific training related to the role. Further recruitment to expand the panel central list is ongoing.

An on-going issue is the Voice of the Child from the children's Social Workers via the completion of a report for the carers annual review. This currently lacks consistency of completion and is a requirement as per the fostering regulations.

#### **4.6 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.

#### **4.7 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. During this last year, applicants and Foster Carers have had to attend virtually, but have continued to participate well.

Between April 2020 and March 2021 there were three referrals made to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The first was considered not to meet the safeguarding threshold for a Local Authority Designated Officer, but raised some practice issues, which the Independent Fostering Agency agreed to pursue with the carer. The second case was considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer for emotional abuse, but the young person withdrew his complaint and the Local Authority Designated Officer did not feel it would have met safeguarding threshold. The final case did proceed to a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) meeting and threshold for physical harm was met. The young person has since moved to another foster placement. All cases dealt with under Local Authority Designated Officer procedures require a full report to Foster Panel to consider de-registration and/or any changes to approval status. In these situations, support and training needs are addressed.

#### **4.8 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.

#### **4.9 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 National Minimum Standards. 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.

We have now developed a different system for separating off end of placement feedback (to be called CA22) and feedback for children still in placement at the time of the annual review (CA21) so we are positive that compliance in this area will improve. We will continue to closely monitor this area of performance and Supervising Social Workers will also take a more proactive approach in ensuring that Panel and the Agency Decision Maker have some feedback from the child's Social Worker, even if this is verbal.

- 4.10 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 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and remained in place until 25<sup>th</sup> 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 prospective 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.

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

- 4.12 Senior Management of service has seen some changes in the last year. The Head of Service retired after many years leading the delivery of the Fostering Service, but has remained involved through a part time professional Panel Advisor role.

The Head of Service post was replaced by a full time Deputy Head of Service post on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021

For a long period of time in 2019/2020, there were sickness absences in the Team Managers across the service which impacted on capacity to lead new areas of development. In November 2020, a new Team Manager was appointed giving the service full management capacity.

- 4.13 At the time of writing this report, there are plans in place to restructure the Fostering Service from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021, to provide 3 distinct Teams, each with a different purpose. The 2 Support Teams will be replaced by 1 Support Team and one Friends and Family Team, the 3rd Team being the Recruitment and Assessment Team. See further information in 4.35, Areas for future development:
- 4.14 A new marketing strategy was developed for 2021-2022 and will be revised on an annual basis to ensure that the marketing activity reflects the demand for foster placements. (See appendix 2).

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 2020/2021 was £27,000. Key activity areas in the marketing plan for 2020/2021 are:

- Four targeted events held in July, September and November 2020 and February 2021. Events were held virtually in response to the Covid pandemic.
- 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.

- 4.15 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.

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 with support from the Corporate Fostering Board. In light of COVID-19 we are responding to changing digital trends and have increased our events, holding an additional event in November. The extra event raised significantly high enquiries, justifying the need to hold four events over 2021-2022.

This year we will be targeting the unemployed in and around Derby City. The effects of COVID-19 has seen high level redundancies which could be an opportunity to promote fostering as a career. Furlough support will be ending in September and this will be a key time to promote fostering.

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.

- 4.16 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 Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers, 4 have been assessed and approved in the last year, another Foster Carer transferred from another Local Authority after moving to the area, and we have 3 more Foster Carers currently being assessed from Independent Fostering Agencies. 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.
- 4.17 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. The basic weekly allowance rates for 2021/22 were increased by 0.9%.

<b>Age of child</b>	<b>Weekly allowance per child 2019/20</b>	<b>Weekly allowance per child 2021/22</b>
0-4	£149.51	£153.57
5-10	£170.31	£174.94
11-15	£212.02	£217.78
16-18	£257.93	£264.94

- 4.18 Recruitment activity between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Initial Enquiries	Information Packs Sent	Initial Visits	Number of households invited to apply	Returned Applications	Approvals

273	155	65	55	36	14 Mainstream  Friends & Family 10
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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. National Minimum Standards 30 allows for family and friends Foster Carers to receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

- 4.19 Of the 273 fostering enquiries, 62% were White British and the majority were between the age of 25-49 years. The average age was 40. This is a positive change to our age profile of carers.
- 4.20 Due to the Covid pandemic the Service was unable to carry out physical events and drop-in sessions and as a result the majority of enquiries were online enquiries via the website. A small proportion of enquiries came as emails to the Fostering Duty Inbox and via word of mouth from existing Foster Carers. The word of mouth referral scheme allows existing Foster Carers to receive a £1000 bonus if the recommendation is successful. There was also a notable increase in enquiries from Foster Carers wishing to transfer from their existing agency.
- 4.21 Analysis of the 4 main targeted virtual events during 2020/2021 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.
- 4.22 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.

- 4.23 65 initial visits were conducted within this period and 49 application forms (79%) 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.
- 4.24 The Recruitment Officer tracks all enquiries and applications to the point of allocation. Of the 49 households invited to apply 30 applications were received (61%). Tracking activity was undertaken on the 19 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.
- 4.25 During 2020/2021 a total of 24 households were presented at Fostering Panel for a recommendation of approval. 14 approvals were mainstream Foster Carers and 10 were family and friends carers.

What is significant is that the number of bedspaces provided by our mainstream Foster Carers in comparison from end of March 2020 to end of March 2021 has increased by 20, an increase of 24%. The number of bedspaces provided in the same timescale by our Family and Friends carers has increased from 21 to 32 in the last year, an increase of 52%. In addition the percentage of children in care in Independent Fostering Agency placements has also fallen, from 56% to 52%, and this is despite the numbers entering care this year and needing placement rising from 588 to 642. All of this is encouraging progress in terms of our capacity to offer placements for our Looked after Children.

- 4.26 There were a total of 14 withdrawn applications during this 12 month period. All withdrawals were initiated by the applicants during stage one of the assessment process. The most common reasons for people withdrawing from the process were due to emerging health issues or changes in personal circumstances.
- 4.27 **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 was 1st October 2020.

To date, Derby City have not had any enquiries going through to the assessment phase of the project, which is disappointing. However, several staff and existing carers have undertaken the UASC training, designed by the Project Team and our Fostering Panel have also had additional training which has been beneficial for all those who have accessed. The Deputy Head of Service has continued to take an active part in Project Board Meetings and has worked with the Council's Data Protection Team to produce a DPIA and ISA to ensure any data shared is kept safe.

#### 4.28 Approval activity since April 2020

In the year from April 2020 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021, there were 24 approvals, 14 mainstream and 10 Family and Friends Carers. The categories for mainstream approvals were as follows:

<b>Approval categories</b>
Permanent : 3
Short -term, not permanent: 7
Emergency: 2
Short breaks: 2
Foster to adopt (temporary approval): 1
Family and Friends: 10

4.29 As of the end of May 2021 there are 31 fostering assessments being undertaken. 18 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 2021/2022. The family and friends approvals currently being assessed under Regulation 24 are providing placements for 19 Looked after Children. It is extremely difficult to predict the number of family and friends 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 Family and Friends Team will remain with the same assessor.

#### 4.30 De-Registrations of Fostering households:

There were a total of 42 de-registrations presented at panel between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. This is double the number the previous year, but is not dissimilar to the experiences of other Local Authorities.

4.31 Out of the 42 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.
- 23 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.
- 1 de-registration was for a Foster to Adopt placement where the Adopter was temporarily approved as Foster Carer whilst waiting to be formally matched by the Adoption Panel.

4.32 The Derby Foster Carers Association (FCA) has had a new chairperson over the last year and this carer has been part of the Corporate Fostering Board meetings and has had an active voice in developments in the Service over the last year. Covid-19 had a massive impact on the events that could be carried out but the Foster Carers Association has continued to meet virtually once a month, and these groups have been well received by newly approved Foster Carers and also our more experienced carers many of whom have a position on the Foster Carers Association committee.

Foster Carers Association 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 attends monthly Foster Carers Association committee meetings, where a solution focussed approach has served to overcome challenges and develop practice.

The contribution of the Foster Carers Association and its members over the past year has been invaluable to the overall development and improvement of the Fostering Service. There is every confidence that as the pandemic starts to ease, the Foster Carers Association will be able to resume its normal coffee mornings, support groups, and social activities. The Foster Carers Association are also involved in the review of the Foster Care Charter.

#### 4.33 Mentoring/buddying service

Over the last year we have developed a buddy scheme for our new Foster Carers and some Carers in the assessment stage where this is felt to be helpful. 10 of our experienced Carers who are on the Payment for Skills Band C or D were trained and supported and this rolled out from March 2021. Buddy's will generally offer between 2 and 4 hours support a month until the Carers first annual review, but this can be flexible according to need. So far the feedback has been really positive and we believe that as a service this will be invaluable and will become a real strength of the Fostering Service going forward

#### 4.34 Foster Carers training pool

Foster Carers have also been involved this year with our Workforce Learning and Development Training Officer, in participating in delivering training. This new training pool consists of about 10 Carers who have been involved in delivering training. They are also planning to develop new courses (eg Through the eyes of the carer course) developing the handbook to be given to new carers, participating

in interviews for Social Worker students and helping at recruitment events by talking to members of the public interested in becoming a Foster Carer for Derby City.

### **Areas for development in the year 2021/2022:**

4. 35 It has been evident during the previous year that the demand for the assessment of Friends and Family Carers, has started to take priority over focussing on recruiting new mainstream Foster Carers, so the development of the Family and Friends Team from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021 will allow the Recruitment and Assessment Team to concentrate even more on completing mainstream assessments in a timely manner and in focusing on reaching more potential Foster Carers from the local area, particularly those families from more diverse communities.

In addition, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, we plan to change all Carers approvals to cover the whole age band of 0-18, as long as Carers can show evidence that they can meet this whole range of needs. This will be reflected in our recruitment activities and also within assessments presented to panel.

4. 36 The Support Team's role will remain relatively unchanged, although they will no longer be offering long term support to Friends and Family Carers, as these will be supported through the new Team. The Support Team will also offer support to Short Breaks Carers. The Team are in the process of developing and training 10 families who can offer placements to Parents and Children together. This is an area that in the past we have had to rely on Independent Fostering Agency to provide so will be a huge cost benefit to the department. The training for the Team will take place from May to July, variations in approvals will take place in August and we hope to be able to start offering Parent and Child placements from September 2021.
4. 37 The new Friends and Family Team will be made up of a full time Manager and 5 Social Workers who will transfer from other areas of the Fostering Service (equating to 3.8 FTE). In addition we have funding agreed for 2 permanent additional Social Work posts. With the full quota of staff, the Team will be able to undertake all Reg 24 Foster Carer assessments and SGO assessment to Kinship Carers. This will relieve work pressures in locality services and avoid duplication of reports between different Teams. The Team will also offer support to Friends and Family Foster Carers post approval which will avoid a change of Social Worker and offer better consistency. To strengthen the offer of support, the existing post SGO support services based in the Exit (Child's Permanence Team), will transfer over to the new Team. This post SGO support will consist of 2 full time Children's Practitioners, one of whom will continue to track SGO assessments and provide financial assessments of need to the SGO Carers who will remain being assessed by the Exit Team. This post has had funding agreed for an additional 0.5 post to make this up to full time and is a permanent position.

### **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. It is planned for a follow up Survey to be circulated in May 2021, specifically focusing on Carers views of how they have been supported during the pandemic.

## **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 2020-2021 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, 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 2020/2021.

In addition to placements made to carers through the Fostering Service, our Children in Care are placed in foster placements commissioned through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) linked to the D2N2 Framework for Children in Care, a partnership between Derby City, Derbyshire County, Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Councils. When considering the types of placements needed for our children and young people, in addition to more fostering placements in local to Derby, there is also a need for more Carers who can support children with socially challenging behaviour, emotional/behavioural needs and sibling groups.

## **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 full time Deputy Head of Service for Fostering. This is a temporary post until March 2022. 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. We have many part time workers across the service which does impact on Managers time in providing supervisions to 21 Social Workers and 2 support staff.

The Deputy 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. This year the training has almost all been on-line which has enabled the service to produce an even more varied programme and has also given more flexibility to Foster Carers who might previously have found attendance more difficult. Moving forward we will look to adopt a hybrid model of virtual and face to face learning opportunities for Foster Carers.

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 and to develop a new Parent and Child fostering scheme.

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

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of sign-off</b>
Legal Finance <b>Service Director(s)</b>	Suanne Lim, Service Director, Early Help and Children's Social Care 01332 642641 suanne.lim@derby.gov.uk	08.07.2021
<b>Report sponsor</b> Other(s)	Andy Smith, Strategic Director Peoples Services	26.08.2021

<b>For more information contact:</b>	Judy Levitt, Deputy Head of Service Fostering 01332 640284 judy.levitt@derby.gov.uk
<b>Background papers:</b>	
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Appendix 2 – Fostering Marketing Strategy 2020/21