



Report to CYP & FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 17 July 2017

Report of: Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, People Services Portfolio

Subject: Fostering Service

Author of Report: Stephanie Kerr Fostering Service Manager,
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Summary: Update on Fostering Service in line with fostering services statutory regulations and guidance

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	x
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the report and its contents

Background Papers:

List any background documents (e.g. research studies, reports) used to write the report. Remember that by listing documents people could request a copy.

- Fostering Service Dataset 2015/2016
- Fostering Service Communications Strategy 'You can foster 2016-17'
- Fostering panel annual review 2016/2017
- Sheffield sufficiency assessment and placement strategy 2017-2020

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, People Services Portfolio

Sheffield City Council Fostering Service

1. Introduction

- 1.1. In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Fostering Services have to report to the executive side of the local authority in regard to the outcomes of the service. The Senior Leadership Team and other Boards within Children, Young Peoples and Families Service have received regular updates in relation to fostering performance.
- 1.2. Under the Ofsted Inspection Framework for 'the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers', fostering services are now incorporated in to the single framework inspection process.

2. Sheffield Fostering Service

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015 - 2017 highlights the importance of the right permanent placement for children, including foster care.

The Sheffield sufficiency assessment and placement strategy 2017-2020 identified that the current accommodation offer for our looked after children is not sufficient to meet the current needs both in numbers and also in types of care provisions.

The sufficiency assessment identifies an increase of the number of children in care since August 2015. At the same time the local authority has experienced a reduction in the number of foster carer approvals.

- 2.1. The Fostering Service is currently refreshing and re-investing in its communications plan and strategy to increase the recruitment of foster carers. The current Fostering Recruitment Campaign was launched in January 2011 and since then there have been a series of bespoke recruitment drives for the Fostering Service these are reviewed and updated annually. Fostering recruitment is identified as a key priority for Children and Families and the city council and as such, the Foster Service has 20 days of communication support allocated to it per financial year, as part of the key campaigns agreement for Children, Young People and Families services.

The campaign's target remains to support the Fostering Service to recruit 40 new foster placements and maintain the above national conversation rate. The focus of the communications plan is to generate good quality enquiries by targeting the right people through the right channels and in the right areas, fitting the profile for successful foster carers.

2.2. The overarching message to potential applicants is 'Fostering – do something special'. Key marketing recruitment campaigns have focused on the recruitment of foster carers for children aged 10 + and sibling groups. Other key messages have included:

Could you foster a child aged 10+?
Fostering – be proud of your very own champ
Fostering – making new memories

Marketing channels are selectively chosen to specifically target our chosen demographics. Channels have included:

- **Advertising:**
Bus and tram adverts, clear channel digital sites throughout the city, Facebook advertising, Intranet leader board advert
- **Digital engagement:**
Social media on existing Facebook and Twitter accounts (both via Fostering and Sheffield City Council accounts), short videos of real foster carers on our YouTube account, Foster Forum
- **Events and face to face:**
Local events and information displays (including the Town Hall, central library), and local events such as Crosspool Festival, Pride and Firth Park Fun Day. We have also had stalls at Aviva, supermarkets across the city and in the Moor market.
- **Media:**
Media coverage specifically during foster fortnight based on case studies of existing carers (16-29th May 2016).
- **Internal communications:**
In addition we have also used our own internal communications channels to target our 8,000 employees.
- **Other**
We have engaged large employers across the city such as the universities in order to target their employees. Spencers Estate Agents targeted their mailing list with information on Fostering.

2.3. Information evenings continue to be scheduled every 6 weeks.

2.4. The retention and recruitment of foster carers remains a key priority: The service is currently revising and refreshing a number of initiatives to enhance and incentivise foster carer recruitment. These include:

- Exploring the financial support offered to our carers
- Reviewing potential for priority re-housing initiatives
- Increasing our 'refer a friend' fees

- Reviewing the Skill Level progression scheme
- Offering further learning & development opportunities for foster carers
- Expanding the events for children in care, foster carers and birth children
- Reviewing our Support Groups/and support for peer groups
- Improving engagement with carers through Foster Forum
- Establishing 'Voices Of Foster Carers' as a service reference group
- Expanding our Foster Carers Open Forums
- Developing a Kids of Foster Carers 'R' Us Group
- Encouraging greater engagement of foster carers in strategic initiatives
- Encourage foster carers involvement in recruitment of Fostering Service staff
- Engage Foster carers in the training and development of staff and prospective foster carers
- Develop experienced foster carers supporting them to become mentors/buddies to newly approved foster carers.

2.3 The Fostering Service and its foster carers continue to provide a high level of care and promote the health, welfare and safety of children and young people. Foster carers receive support from qualified workers in line with statutory regulations and guidance. A robust training and development package enables foster carers to develop their understanding and skills to support children and young people and promote positive outcomes for them.

In the first year following approval and within 12 months of their first placement each foster carer completes a training and development portfolio this links to their personal learning and development plan which is reviewed annually.

Our Foster Carers core training programme has been refreshed placing the main areas of focus on:-

- Principles and values
- Roles and responsibilities
- Recording (record keeping?)
- Safe caring
- Equality and diversity
- Effective communication
- Safeguarding Children
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Moving and Handling of Children
- Paediatric 1st Aid
- Caring for BME Children
- Allegations

- E-learning

The service appointed to a training and development post in April 2016 to oversee the coordination of training delivered to foster carers. In addition to the extensive training programme for foster carers set out above, the service also provides training on issues such as; managing difficult behaviour, introduction to safeguarding, introduction to child development and attachment, understanding Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

In 2016/17 there were 2 courses provided to foster carers by the South Yorkshire Empower and Protect Child Sexual Exploitation Innovation Project ('CSE' and 'Working with Teens with Multiple & Severe Vulnerabilities'). Workshops provided on Solution Focussed Brief Intervention Therapy, Micro Counselling, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, the Importance of the Foster Carer's Role in Transitions, Closer in Play (levels 1&2), Enhanced Teen Triple P Parenting Course, and a new course on Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties.

Support from the Multi-Agency Psychological Service (MAPS) is also made available they provide advice to foster carers in relation to individual children supporting carers in their role with specialist advice on issues such as transition to adoption.

2.4 The service has two established fostering panels which aim to meet monthly. Both panels have the same Chair and Vice-Chair, enabling the panel to remain consistent in its leadership and in the recommendations they make. The Vice-Chair assumes the chairing role four times per year in order to develop and maintain their chairing skills.

2.5 Since 2015 our Adoption Agency Advisor took on the responsibility as Agency Advisor to the Fostering Panel. This post is currently filled by two part time staff each of whom hold a primary role for the Fostering and Adoption Panel's respectively which allows for appropriate agency advice for all Fostering and Adoption Panel's.

2.6 Fostering Panels held each month

April 2016	0
May 2016	1
June 2016	1
July 2016	1
August 2016	0
September 2016	2
October 2016	1
November 2016	2
December 2016	1
January 2017	1
February 2017	1

There were a total of 14 panels held between April 2016-March 2017, with capacity to hold 2 panels per month dependent on service need. Where necessary additional panels can be arranged.

- 2.7 From April 2016 – March 2017 the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) has been Christine Bennett Assistant Director, Fieldwork Services. The ADM is a nominated person within the fostering agency who has the legal responsibility to make an approval decision. The ADM's role is to consider the fostering panel's recommendation to make the final decision. In most circumstances this ADM accepts the fostering panel's recommendation; the Panel Advisor offers advice and support to enable this process. The ADM for Fostering was changed in May 2017 and is now Joel Hanna Assistant Director, Provider services.
- 2.8 The Fostering Service has continued to experience a number of vacancies partly due to the retirement of experienced long standing staff members and the service is currently recruiting to a number of existing and newly established posts.
- 2.9 There were 18 new approvals of foster carers between April 2016-2017, which translated to 24 new placements being available for children.
- 2.10 The table below shows the number Foster Care families and the number of placements in these for the last two years. From this we can see that although the number of Foster Families has remained consistent the number of placements within these families has increased.

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. Foster Families</u>	<u>No. Placements</u>
<u>31/03/16</u>	<u>264</u>	<u>292</u>
<u>30/04/17</u>	<u>265</u>	<u>315</u>

As at 30th April 2017 there was an overall capacity of 414 beds meaning that the service was running at an occupancy level of 76%. These additional beds remained vacant for a variety of reasons including beds being blocked, holidays, task carers and the foster carer being approved to care for younger children.

- 2.11 Where appropriate young people remain living with their foster carers after the age of 18 years. These arrangements are known as 'Staying Put', and seek to ensure that young people can continue to remain part of their foster family and progress to more independent living at a

time, and pace, that is based both on their assessed needs, as detailed within their Pathway Plan, and in accordance with their wishes and feelings. As of the 31st March 2016 there were 16 young people aged 18 years older remaining in placement with their foster carer. The current indication is that of the current 16/17 year old cohort in LA foster placements (27 individuals) 85% or 23 individuals will potentially stay put. This will place further pressure on the fostering services capacity in providing placements which needs to be factored into the service recruitment and retention strategy.

2.12 At present the area of highest demand for placements is for older children, this is one of the most challenging areas of foster carer recruitment as such we are currently reviewing the package of support available to these foster carers.

2.13 As the number of Children in Care has continued to increased over the past 18 months, the number of local authority foster carers has decreased though retirement, deregistration and conversion to staying put. Therefore the need to increase our pool of carers has become more acute. In order to address this Children and Families have agreed an investment in the fostering services which is anticipated to be offset by the saving realised though reducing the number of independently purchased placements.

The investment will enhance our fostering services though establishing a temporary project manager role to undertake a comprehensive in-service review including benchmarking, developing the In Service Education and Training (INSET) programme, undertake a comprehensive analysis of the service's foster carers' training and support needs and, support our marketing and recruitment strategy over the next three years.

The investment will also allow the service to establish and embed a specialist psychologist within the fostering service to support carers and supervising social workers embedding a delivery model underpinned by evidence based child psychological understanding and principles.

Additionally the investment will support the creation of new specialist fee paid support carers and allow implementation of a new skill level 4, these carers will support our most vulnerable and at risk young people.

2.14 During 2016/2017 19 foster carers either withdrew from fostering or were deregistered. The service aims to review the reasons for all foster carers exiting the service ensuring that we continuously improve and develop our practice supporting efforts to retain carers.

'The Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013' details a change in practice regarding the resignation of foster carers. This means that where a foster carer gives their resignation in writing, this becomes final 28 days later without exception.

In circumstances where there were concerns or an allegation is made in respect of a foster carer that leads to deregistration, this is reported to panel and information is retained on file. This may prevent the carer being registered as foster carer in the future. Records are used to inform practice and support the prevention of future allegations.

To help with continued development of the fostering service exit questionnaires are sent to every foster carer that resigns from the service. Within the current year and as part of our service development the service is establishing a more robust leaver's process to capitalise on learning and enhance service development.

3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- 3.1 It is important that Sheffield children in care are cared for within the city. Local Authorities have a legislative duty to ensure that children are placed locally and that we have sufficient accommodation within the city to meet the needs of our children.
- 3.2 The sufficiency duty requires local authorities to do more than simply ensure that accommodation be 'sufficient' in terms of the number of beds provided. They must have regard to the benefits of securing a range of accommodation through a number of providers. The accommodation must also meet the needs of children. The Fostering Service remains our primary source of carers for our Children in Care.
- 3.3 Increasing and retaining the number of foster carers within the city ensure that outcomes for children in care are enhanced and that we are able to maximise the resource in the city to support our children.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee are asked to note the content of the report and provide challenge to the service in respect of service activity.