

## Corporate Parenting Board – July 2016

<b>Title of paper:</b>	Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention	
<b>Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):</b>	Helen Blackman, Director – Children’s Integrated Services. <a href="mailto:Helen.blackman@nottinghamcity.gov.uk">Helen.blackman@nottinghamcity.gov.uk</a>	<b>Wards affected:</b> All
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<b>Other colleagues who have provided input:</b>		
<b>Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)</b>		
<b>Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:</b>		
Strategic Regeneration and Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Planning and Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Community Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy, Sustainability and Customer	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jobs, Growth and Transport	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Adults, Health and Community Sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Children, Early Intervention and Early Years	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Leisure and Culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Resources and Neighbourhood Regeneration	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):</b>		
This report addresses strategies for the recruitment and retention opportunities of Foster Carers.		
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>		
<b>1</b>	It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board notes the recruitment and retention performance of the Fostering Service, and the activities undertaken by the Service to recruit and support Foster Carers.	

### **1 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.1 According to the National Charity Fostering Network, nationally 9,070 new Foster families are needed in the next 12 months to care for a range of children, with the greatest need being Foster Carers for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Every 20 minutes across the UK a child comes into care in need of a Foster family. It has also been pledged, in the most recent Nottingham Labour Manifesto, that the number of Nottingham City Foster Carers is to increase by 20%.

## **2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)**

- 2.1 There are 590 children in the care of the City, as recorded on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016. These are the most vulnerable children in the City, some known to Children's Services for some time, and many with complex needs. The majority of our children are placed with Foster Carers. The Department recognises that if children are unable to live safely with birth parents or their extended family, then a setting that offers the experience of family life is best. This is what a placement with Foster Carers can offer.
- 2.2 The Department places most children in our care with Foster Carers. We would wish to place as many children as possible with our own in-house mainstream Carers.
- 2.3 Many of our Foster Carers live in the City or the County, as we would wish to recruit more Carers living locally so that our children can be placed locally. They can then continue relationships with friends, and remain at the same school even if they are not living with birth families. We would prefer to place with our own Carers rather than with an Independent Fostering Agency, which may be further away and disrupt established relationships.
- 2.4 For some of our children although they may not be able to live with their birth families, it is important for them to retain close links with the birth family and many will continue to have regular contact with their families. It is easier for support and contact to be maintained with local Foster Carers.
- 2.5 A placement near to home, and within the Council, makes communication easier for the child's Social Worker and the Fostering Supervising Social Worker, because they work for the same agency. Any successful placement is dependent on good communication between the staff concerned.
- 2.6 A successful placement also needs to be supported well. The support to the placement is easier to put in place when all work is in the same department as support from CAMHS, the Virtual School, and Targeted Support are all delivered from the Council or linked agencies.
- 2.7 It makes efficient use of the budget to have more of our children with our own Foster Carers, as we do not have to pay the additional Independent Fostering Agency fees.

### **RECRUITMENT STRATEGY**

- 2.8 The City has a recruitment strategy aimed at recruiting more Foster Carers and retaining existing Foster Carers. Over the Christmas period, the 25 for 25 Campaign was launched aimed at gaining 25 new Foster Carers for 25 children by the 25<sup>th</sup> December, relating specifically to older children and teenagers. The evaluation of the impact of this campaign is on-going, due to the length of the process around registration when applying to become a Foster Carer. The results of this campaign will therefore become clearer in the near future.
- 2.9 We advertise on the Nottingham City Council website, and a refreshed web page is currently being designed. We have two dedicated Customer Service Officers for Fostering who ensure they are the point of contact for any prospective Foster Carer, from the application stage through to approval. Each month, Information Evenings are held with regards to Fostering. These evenings serve as an opportunity for

prospective Foster Carers to find out more about the process, speak to experienced members of the Fostering Team and meet some of the most dedicated and passionate Foster Carers, who share their experiences about Fostering.

- 2.10 We have staff at local events such as the Riverside Festival, Caribbean Carnival, Pride and the Robin Hood Marathon and we have recently had staff at the Central Library.
- 2.11 We have monthly Information Meetings where anyone interested in Fostering can find out more. We have run Information Meetings at City Centre Churches and have delivered promotional material to local Mosques.
- 2.12 In May during Fostering Fortnight there were a number of activities that Fostering staff and Foster Carers were involved in, with the aim of raising the profile of Fostering and recruiting more Foster Carers. This involved giving out leaflets and talking to members of the public at the Railway Station and Council House and an information desk at Loxley House. In addition to this Foster Carers, including the Lead Member, were interviewed for the radio and local television in relation to their Fostering experience, and our offer to prospective Carers.
- 2.13 We recognise, from research undertaken by the Nottingham Trent University Business School and from our own experience, that well supported and satisfied Carers are our best recruiters, and so we have initiated a “Refer a Friend” scheme. This entails a financial incentive for any Foster Carer who introduces a friend, who is then approved as a Foster Carer and has a child placed. One of our first Foster Carers is about to be the first to receive this reward.

## **2.14 RECRUITMENT STATISTICS**

**1<sup>ST</sup> April 2015 to 31<sup>ST</sup> March 2016**

**Number of Foster Carers recruited by Nottingham City Council from 1st April 2015 - 31st March 2016:**

**(Breakdown by Approval Age of Child / Children)**

	<b>Approved FC</b>	<b>0-4</b>	<b>5-10</b>	<b>11-18</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>Apr-15</b>	4	1	2	1		4
<b>May</b>	2		1	1		2
<b>June</b>	2	2				2
<b>July</b>	2		2			2
<b>Aug</b>	2		1	1		2
<b>Sept</b>	2		1	1		2
<b>Oct</b>	3		3			3
<b>Nov</b>	5	2		3		5
<b>Dec</b>	3	2		1		3
<b>Jan-16</b>	1	1				1
<b>Feb</b>	0					
<b>Mar</b>	3	3				3
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>29</b>

## **RETENTION**

- 2.15 We have made a lot of effort to retain the Carers we have. We have a well-established, dedicated and experienced Team of Supervising Social Workers. They have received additional training as a group, which we commissioned from Coram / BAAF. Every Foster Carer has their own Supervising Social Worker who they can contact at any time for support.
- 2.16 Carers are regularly reviewed. They can access a fully updated and revised training programme, to give them the skills needed to address the complex needs of our children.
- 2.17 We run support groups in Bulwell, Clifton and Lenton that any Foster Carer can attend.
- 2.18 There are regular six-weekly Fostering Business Meetings that alternate between the day time and evening. The meetings are an opportunity for the Department to share what is happening with and for Foster Carers. Recently however we have had attendance from CAMHS, the Signs of Safety Head, and the Fostering Network regarding tax implications within Fostering and the Leaving Care Team regarding staying put arrangements. The Virtual Headteacher regularly attends these meetings and Social Workers can seek support as regards any educational issues that the child they are caring for has.
- 2.19 In addition to this, all our Carers are members of the Fostering Network and can assess the services of the Fostering Networks Advice and Mediation Worker.
- 2.20 We are constantly looking at different ways to reward our Carers and acknowledge our appreciation of them. Last year, for the first time, four of our Carers received a GEM Award for their contribution to Fostering.
- 2.21 A number of our Foster Carers have left due to retirement; some have fostered for several years, and decided that their Fostering career should end.
- 2.22 Some adopt the children in placement and are unable to continue Fostering.
- 2.23 We try to retain the services of as many carers as we can, and a number after they have “retired” from full-time Fostering will continue to be Respite Carers for us.
- 2.24 Between April 2015 and March 2016, 27 Fostering households have left the Service. This is due to a variety of reasons such as retirement, a significant change in personal circumstances or the granting of a Special Guardianship Order for the child in placement. This reduces the number of Foster Carers available to care for children.

## **3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 None.

**4 FINANCE COMMENTS (INCLUDING IMPLICATIONS AND VALUE FOR MONEY/VAT)**

- 4.1 It is difficult to make a direct comparison between the Local Authority and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) costs, due to the latter being regulated as an independent business and not having the same, wider statutory duties of the Local Authority. The average weekly costs of the Local Authority relate to the average payments made to Carers, the IFA average weekly costs include staffing, management and premises costs on top of amounts paid directly to the Carers. The average weekly costs are as calculated in 2015, during the review of Fostering payments, and are as follows:
- £814 - average weekly IFA payment, made to an Agency.
  - £451 - average weekly Internal with on costs, which covers payments to Carers and staffing costs.

**5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COMMENTS (INCLUDING RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES, AND LEGAL, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS)**

- 5.1 None.

**6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COMMENTS (FOR DECISION RELATING TO ALL PROPERTY ASSETS AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE) (AREA COMMITTEE REPORTS ONLY)**

- 6.1 None.

**7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 Has the equality impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?

No



An EIA is not required because the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions.

(Please explain why an EIA is not necessary)

**8 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION**

- 8.1 None.

**9 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT**

- 9.1 None.