

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – JULY 2017

Title of paper:	Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Blackman – Director, Children’s Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Sonia Cain – Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption Sonia.cain@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:		
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)		
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
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"/>
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
This report addresses the strategies for the recruitment and retention opportunities of foster carers.		
Recommendation(s):		
1	To note 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, over 9,000 new foster families are needed nationally 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.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

- 2.1 The City has just over 600 children in their care as recorded on 1st June 2017. These are the most vulnerable children in the City, some known to 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 a foster carer offers.

- 2.2 The Department places most children in our care with foster carers. We would wish to place many of our children with our own in-house mainstream carers.
- 2.3 Many of our foster carers live in the City or the County and 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 those children who are unable to live with their birth families, it is important where possible for them to retain close links with their 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 in the same department, as support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the Virtual School, and Targeted Support are all delivered from the same Council or linked Agencies.
- 2.7 It also 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. We have two established and dedicated Customer Service Officers for both Fostering and Adoption, who are a point of contact for any prospective foster carer from the application stage through to approval. Each month Information Evenings are held at Loxley House, for anyone thinking about fostering. They are always attended by a foster carer and members of the fostering team to answer any queries those interested may have about fostering, and to share their own experiences of fostering. We advertise on Facebook, Twitter and on the Nottingham City Council website. We are about to launch our new refreshed web page as we recognise that for many applying to become a foster carer, using the internet is more convenient.
- 2.9 In May we took part in Foster Carer Fortnight, a National Campaign to recruit more foster carers. The Fostering team took part in a number of activities to raise the profile of fostering and to recruit more carers. This included handing out leaflets and talking to members of the public in the Old Market Square and Victoria Centre. Our Service Director, the Bishop of Nottingham and a Nottingham City foster carer took

part in a live programme on BBC Radio Nottingham. The Bishop and his wife are former foster carers. We held an Information Evening at a local school targeted at the local community. There was also an Information Evening at the local city centre church, which is part of a developing partnership that we are having with local faith groups. Earlier in the year we held a similar Information Evening at a local mosque.

2.10 Fostering staff regularly attend local event such as the Riverside Festival, Caribbean Carnival, and Pride to promote fostering. This year we plan to attend 2 new events “Lark in the Park” in West Bridgford and “Glow Worm” a camping event in Clumber Park.

2.11 We have recently appointed, on a year’s contract, a dedicated Recruitment Consultant and a Fostering Project Officer to assist with Recruitment. There is a target set of 12 for the number of foster carers to be recruited this year. Their continuing employment in the role will be dependent on reaching the target that has been set. So far with the number of foster carers recruited, and the numbers in the process of being assessed, this looks an achievable target, provided we retain our current carers.

2.12 RECRUITMENT STATISTICS

1ST April 2016 to 31ST March 2017

NUMBER OF APPROVED FOSTER CARERS THE CITY RECRUITED, BY AGE OF FOSTER CHILDREN:

	0-4 years	0-10 years	0-18 years	Total
Apr-16	1		1	2
May		2		2
June				
July		1	1	2
Aug			2	2
Sept		2	1	3
Oct	1		2	3
Nov				
Dec	1		1	2
Jan-17			1	1
Feb-17	1	1	2	4
Mar-17			2	2
Total				23

RETENTION STRATEGY

- 2.13 We continue to maintain our efforts to retain the carers that we have, and to look at innovative ways to “reward” our carers for what they do. We have a well-established, dedicated and experienced team of supervising social workers. Every foster carer has their own supervising social worker who regularly visits them, and who they can contact at any time regarding their fostering role.
- 2.14 Our foster carers are regularly and formally reviewed where any changes to their status can be discussed and agreed. We run Support Groups for foster carers in Clifton and Lenton, where foster carers can meet with other foster carers in their area.
- 2.15 There are six-weekly Fostering Business meetings that alternate between day and evening sessions. The meetings offer all our foster carers the opportunity to meet with Senior Managers within the Department, and for the Department to share current issues and concerns, and consult in relation to new initiatives.
- 2.16 The Service Manager, Virtual School regularly attends the Business meetings to address any issues in relation to education that carers may have. So far this year we have also had the NSPCC attend the Business meeting, in relation to work they are doing with life story work for children in foster care. Life story work is important for children who are in foster care for some time to help them maintain a clear understanding of their life history.
- 2.17 The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) has attended, to inform foster carers in relation to the contact that the Department has with them to provide advocacy for children in care, and children who are subject to Child Prevention Conferences. NYAS also provides an independent visiting scheme for children in care who are not regularly in contact with their birth families, and who have been assessed as requiring this service.
- 2.18 The Missing Children’s team have attended to discuss their role and what foster carers need to do if a child goes missing.
- 2.19 Earlier this year one of our local City MPs attended, to seek the views of our foster carers in relation to all aspects of their fostering experience. The MP is a member of a Parliamentary Select Committee enquiring into fostering, and wished to obtain the views of foster carers first hand, which she was able to do at a well-attended Business meeting.
- 2.20 We have recently fully reviewed and updated our training programme for this year. Where we have received positive comments from foster carers, we will run a course the following year, or more than once during the year. Particularly well received courses have been PACE, which looks at Therapeutic Parenting and is achieved by an outside facilitator, and our “Fostering Attachments” course which is delivered by colleagues in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- 2.21 We pay for all our carers to be members of the Fostering Network where they can receive the latest information relative to developments in fostering, and they also access the services of the Fostering Network Advice and Mediation Worker.

- 2.22 We are constantly looking at different ways to reward our carers and acknowledge our appreciation of them.
- 2.23 For the second year running carers were nominated and received a GEM Award for their contribution to Fostering.
- 2.24 In March there was a “Foster Carer Celebration” evening at the Council House with a 3 course meal, music and entertainment provided by a City School. We rewarded publically, several of our carers who had been fostering for over 20 years. Our Communications and Marketing team met with the carers beforehand and did a short video of them sharing how they came into fostering, the rewards it has given them, and the pleasure that they have gained from the role. The event was well attended, with many foster carers unaware that they were part of a large fostering community.
- 2.25 Works Perks is an employee benefits scheme where staff can choose from over 6000 lifestyle discounts. This can include discounts at well-known shops, cinema, discounted holidays and travel, and local offers from businesses. We consulted with foster carers, and will shortly offer works perks to all foster carers who foster with Nottingham City.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The recommendation is to note the report; therefore there were no other options considered.

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

- 4.1 None.

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

- 5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COLLEAGUE 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:

(Please explain why an EIA is not necessary)

Not required as the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions.

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.