

Corporate Parenting Board - 20 September 2021

Title of paper:	Update report on Fostering recruitment and retention	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Watson - Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services,	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Audrey Taylor, Service Manager Audrey.taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:		
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	6 th September 2021	
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Nottingham People		
Living in Nottingham		
Growing Nottingham		
Respect for Nottingham		
Serving Nottingham Better		X
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
<p>This report is an update report on the recruitment activity of new foster carers and the retention of existing carers in the fostering service.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
	<p>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.</p>	

1 Reasons for recommendations

- 1.1 Fostering is an integral part of the service we provide in Nottingham City. We need to place children in care in foster homes internally wherever possible. These homes must be safe secure and nurturing.
- 1.2 By placing children with internal foster carers they are more likely to be able to access local provision, maintain their local connections, and potentially less disruptive. Internal placements are also not as costly as external provision.

2 Background (including outcomes of consultation)

- 2.1 The City had 712 children in their care as recorded on 31st July 2021. These are the most vulnerable children in the City, some of them known to services for some time, and many with complex needs. This is a slight increase since December 2020 when the report was last updated. The majority of these children (482) 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 continue to strive to place many more of our children with our own in-house mainstream carers. In terms of costs of placements, we have increased our approved foster carers numbers to the point where we are now providing City Council foster placements for 54% of the required placements (recorded at 31st July 2021) which is a slight increase since the last report in December 2020.

There have been 17 resignations/deregistration since 1st January 2021 some of these carers have been on hold during Covid-19 and have now made the decision they no longer wish to continue to foster.

- Care standards – 2
- Safeguarding – 2
- Family priorities/work commitment – 6
- Health – 2
- Retired – 2
- Moved out of area – 1
- Special Guardianship Order – 1
- Covid and support issues - 1

- 2.3 Placing children within families and connected persons carers have increased at a fast pace. There is an increase from 68 placements in December 2020 to 74 families where 91 children are placed, this is creating additional pressure within the fostering service as they are treated the same as mainstream carers. The additional pressures that the courts are facing in delays to care proceedings means the exit plans for these children are further delayed.

Recruitment Strategy

- 2.4 The City Council's recruitment strategy is aimed at recruiting more local foster carers and retaining existing foster carers for a longer period. Currently the average number of years a household fosters is 8. We seek to increase this to enable children who are placed to have the opportunity to stay longer if that's the right plan for them. We recently lost our recruitment consultant as part of the vacancy savings at the end March 2021. The customer service officer has increased her role to pick up some of the work the consultant did however there is a gap in marketing communications skill set in generating online marketing and the best way to generate interest in fostering for Nottingham City. We currently do not pay for this service from our COMMS team.
- 2.5 There has been a quiet period over the summer in interest in recruitment events and fostering, the Information evening events will restart in September and are held on line, broadcast from Loxley House, for anyone thinking about Fostering. Prior to the Covid

restrictions these events were face to face and were always attended by a foster carer and members of the Fostering Team who answered any queries from guests interested in fostering, and to share their own experiences of fostering. Covid restrictions required us to create a safe and effective new way to continue to recruit foster carers and we moved our events on line. These regular events are not the same as a face to face event, but we still share films on the fostering role, and have a Q and A session that helps potential applicants consider all the information that hopefully leads to them making a request for a visit from the Recruitment Team. Enquiries have continued to come via this method. The team are currently completing risk assessments to try and reinstate face to face recruitment events at Loxley when safe to do so. The information evenings have been timetabled for the 1st Wednesday in every month until the end of the financial year.

- 2.6 We are doing a joint collaboration as part of the D2 N2 group to compile a video to promote fostering in Nottingham City. We are working to increase our on line presence and promote Fostering Services on Facebook through google ads, Twitter and on the Nottingham City Council website. Covid continues to present us with challenges in terms of recruitment, but we have responded creatively and we continue to receive enquiries, arrange virtual visits and process applications.
- 2.7 Since 1st December we have so far approved 15 carers and have a further 15 applicants in the process. We have increased our panel capacity by creating 10 additional panels for the remainder of the year, this is so that applicant's applications can be heard to fit within the timescale. It also allows for the increase in connected person's applications, first annual reviews and any concerns in relation to foster carers who need to return back to panel following a review.
- 2.8 The City Council Fostering Recruitment Service continue to work in partnership with 100 homes / City Prayer. We have part funding a post for a link worker; the role includes supporting church members in early stages of recruitment process, holding service reviews and unpicking barriers to recruitment when they arise. We are in the process of renewing this contract and plan the next phase of recruitment activity.
- 2.9 Supported Lodgings is a particular type of placement aimed at older young people and is designed to support their transition into adulthood. Barnardo's are working with Nottingham City Council to develop a needs led pathway of accommodation for care experienced young people as they move on from care. As part of this pathway, Barnardo's are using funds from a legacy left by a supporter to develop a Supported Lodgings scheme for care experienced young people in Nottingham City. We have just had our first supported lodgings carer attend panel this month.
- 2.10 In addition to the activity set out above there is a range of on-going work as we respond to the need to work more and more on line. We have also completed a leaflet drop in April/May 2021 this was funded by Celia Knight. We are working with our COMMS team to look at ways to increase our reach. We are promoting "cuppa with a carer" an informal chat with a carer for anyone interested in fostering and want to know what it's like from a carers perspective.
- 2.11 As part of the recruitment process under Covid restrictions we have moved our Skills to Foster Training on line. We have commissioned therapeutic parenting training that has contributed to the applicants developing new parenting strategies that some foster children will benefit from. Feedback is positive and while the training groups are smaller and therefore not as cost effective, the evaluation is positive and the applicants report

their skills have been increased significantly having had the training. Going forward we plan to continue to run Skills to Foster Training virtually every month until such time when we can safely return to our face to face training in Loxley House. We have managed to secure funding to train one of our recruitment workers in therapeutic skill, the plan is that she can then deliver the training without the need to commission this work. It is an accredited course.

- 2.12 We continue to experience considerable barriers in regard to arranging and completing medicals, these are a statutory requirement for any prospective foster carer. The Government did recognise this and for a period of time we were able to accept health self-assessment that were then sent on to our medical adviser to comment on in terms of the applicant's fitness to foster. These rules will end in September 2021 which means we cannot approve carers without medical information. If Covid continues to impact on applicants getting health assessments in a timely way this will impact on our recruitment activity.
- 2.13 The Fostering Recruitment Team are now facing the risk of losing potential foster carers, due primarily to the delay in completing medicals with GP's not having capacity due to Covid. We have compiled a list of contracted independent medical assessors, who must be a qualified GP, to perform our medicals in a timely and effective manner. We have secured a budget for this service, however health won't give the independent medical assessors access to the applicant's medical records to complete the assessments.

Retention Strategy

- 2.14 The dedicated and experienced team of Supervising Social Workers have faced a number of staffing challenges. We have had sickness in the team and have failed to recruit agency staff to offer capacity during the last 4 months. We have had a number of Supervising Social Workers resign due to pay. We have been able to make 2 temporary workers permanent and have an agency worker joining the team in mid September to cover sickness. This has led to some carers feeling unsupported. We are looking at ways in which to help stabilise the team we have brought in a worker who had recently retired to visit and offer support to carers. Calls have been made to carers without a worker by the management team to offer reassurance. A request for another agency worker to offer capacity in the team has been made.
- 2.15 We have introduced a Buddy scheme, offering peer mentoring by experienced foster carers, foster carers tell us that this is a much-valued service that is growing steadily. New carers tell us that they have been helped by the buddy and are growing in confidence because if it this continues to grow and offer valuable support during difficult times.
- 2.16 The Fostering team have developed a Therapeutic Support Team. The Therapeutic Support Team provides therapeutic based interventions, support, and advice, recognising that caring for children can feel overwhelming at times and sometimes patterns of behaviour and the way families get on together can become very stuck. They offer monthly consultation slots for foster carers and professional and also offer home visits however due to staffing difficulties in CAMHS service this is currently on hold whilst a worker is identified to co-facilitate this with fostering.
- 2.17 We have reviewed and updated our training programme for 2021 which all training course will be run virtually apart from the paediatric first aid course. We are currently

only providing mandatory training as there have been some challenges in the training team in service delivery. We have scheduled to roll out more bespoke courses later in the year once the details have been finalised.

- 2.18 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. There is a part time case worker currently working with a number of carers who need this support.

3 Other options considered in making recommendations

- 3.1 None

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 (EIA)

- 7.1 An EIA is not required because this report does not include substantial changes to policy, services or functions that negatively impact differentially on any group with protected characteristics.

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