

Corporate Parenting Board - 18 July 2022

Title of paper:	Update report on Fostering recruitment and retention	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Ailsa Barr – Director, Children’s Integrated Services Catherine Underwood – Corporate Director of People	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Audrey Taylor, Service Manager Audrey.taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Sarah Bartlett, Fostering Recruitment Manager Bala Gurusamy, Fostering Manager Julie Proctor Fostering Recruitment Officer Lucy Daibell Fostering Recruitment Officer Lynsey Archer Fostering Recruitment Officer	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	27 th June 2022	
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Clean and Connected Communities Keeping Nottingham Working Carbon Neutral by 2028 Safer Nottingham Child-Friendly Nottingham Healthy and Inclusive Keeping Nottingham Moving Improve the City Centre Better Housing Financial Stability Serving People Well	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
This report is the Annual Report of the Fostering Service , including an update on the recruitment activity of new foster carers and the retention of existing carers in the fostering service.		
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 Fostering is an integral part of the service we provide in Nottingham City. We need to place children in their local community with our Foster Carers wherever possible. These homes must be safe, secure, and nurturing.

1.2 By placing children with our own Foster Carers, they are more likely to be able to access local provision, maintain their local connections, thus providing much needed stability. When we utilise Internal Foster Carers the cost is lower than an external provision.

2 Background (including outcomes of consultation)

2.1 The City had 724 children in their care as recorded on 31st March 2022. These are the most vulnerable children in the City, some of the children have been known to our Services for some time, and many of the children have complex needs. This is an increase since September 2021. Most of these children (482) are placed with foster carers and we place more children with our own carers than IFA carers. In March 2022 we had a total of 221 carers including mainstream and connected carers. This is a reduction in numbers as March 2021 we had 238 carers.

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.

Carers who have left the service

2.3 There have been 50 Resignations/Deregistration's since 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 Some carers asked to be on hold during Covid-19 and have now made the decision they no longer wish to continue to foster. Of the 50 carers who have ended their caring role 24 of these were due to positive outcomes for CIC either through special guardianship orders, child arrangement orders, adoption or return to birth parents.

2.4 Deregistration detail 2021 -2022:

Mainstream Foster carer

4 – deregistration – safeguarding concerns

5 – resigned – retired

5 – resigned – ill health

4 – resigned – SGO or Adoption for child in their care

3 – resigned – lack of support from LA

7 – resigned – personal reasons such as work, caring commitment

Total = 28

Connected Persons carer

12 – resigned – SGO/CAO

7 – resigned – returned to birth parent

1 – resigned – YP turned 18 yrs

1 – resigned – child removed from their care due to concerns

1 – resigned – negative assessment

Total = 22

Total of 50 resignations/deregistration

Allegations

2.5 There were 7 allegations made against foster carers, mainstream and connected carers. Of the 7, 2 resulted in no further action 1 the outcome was further

monitoring and 4 were referred to the fostering panel to review their fostering approval status.

Independent Review Mechanism

2.6 There were 3 applications made to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). This is where carers are in dispute with the agency decision not to approve or continue with their approval of their registration. In all 3 cases the decision was upheld not to continue with their registration, and they were deregistered, all 3 were for safeguarding reasons.

Complaints

2.7 There were 4 complaints made by foster carers of which 2 were upheld. 2 complaints were made by birth parents and 1 complaint was upheld.

Connected Persons (Family and Friend's Carers)

2.8 Placing children within families and connected person's carers have increased at a fast pace. In 2018 where 28 placements were made, in 2020 this figure increased to 68 placements. In 2021 there were 97 children placed with 71 families.

2.9 Connected Carers/Persons foster placements can be granted temporarily on an emergency basis under Regulation 24, when a positive viability assessment is completed and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. The assessments are completed and presented to fostering panel within 16 weeks of the placement date, where this is not possible, a further extension of 8 weeks is requested to keep the placement legally regulated. We have now reviewed our processes, documentation, and procedures to improve the quality, robustness, and timeliness of these assessments. We have also developed a new Kinship Care Policy. These have all now been agreed and implemented. The Supervising Social Workers support these Carers from the date we receive the referral from the child's Social Work team. Carers are supported with weekly fostering allowances and equipment/furniture for children to help them settle in. Connected carers are given a specific handbook containing information pertaining to their role of Connected Carers. Some carers go on to seek a Special Guardianship Order/Child Arrangement Order. In the last year 30 children placed with Connected Foster Carers were granted a Special Guardianship Order/Child Arrangement Order.

2.10 We complete an average of 40 full assessments in a year with Connected Foster Carers (Coram BAAF Form – C). For many years the assessments have been outsourced to an independent provider agency. In 2022, we have been piloting bringing assessments in-house like how we assess mainstream foster carers. Currently 12 connected carer's assessments are being undertaken in-house. This will improve the quality of the assessment by offering regular support to the assessing social workers, ensure a closer relationship with carers from day one and make savings

2.11 As part of D2N2 Consortium we are working to offer four days training on Skills to Foster for connected foster carers training every month with our D2N2 partners. This training included the component on Therapeutic Parenting.

2.12 We also have a support group exclusively for Connected Carers focusing on Therapeutic Parenting and Trauma informed practice. They can also attend the services' 6 weekly Fostering Support meeting. All our Connected Carers have access to independent support from the Fostering Network. Most of our Connected Carers will opt for Special Guardianship Order (SGO) as part of the outcome of care proceedings in the court, leading to permanency for children and an exit from care. Carers are supported with independent legal advice funded by the service to consider their options. Carers choosing to remain long-term connected carer are provided with the same level of support as mainstream foster carer in accordance with National Minimum Standard of Fostering.

Recruitment Strategy

2.13 The City Council's recruitment strategy is aimed at recruiting more local foster carers for the children in our care and retaining existing foster carers for a longer period. Currently the average number of years a household foster is 8. From 1st April 2021 the Recruitment Team capacity reduced as the Recruitment Consultant was made redundant as part of the vacancy savings in March 2021. This full-time role has had to be incorporated into the workload of our part time temporary Customer Service Officer. We have asked for approval for the post be full time and permanent. Currently there is a gap in the marketing communications skill set since the Marketing Budget was ceased in March 2021. Generating online marketing was found to be the best way to create interest in Fostering for Nottingham City. There is currently no budget or support for this service from our COMMS team, without these support networks we will fall behind our competitors in the independent sector. Foster carers recruitment needs to be sophisticated and targeted at people who can care for the children we look after, including sibling groups, older children and children who are Black, Asian or from a minor ethnic group. As part of the City's Transformation Programme it has been identified that there need sort be investment and technical support to develop a modern recruitment process and marketing strategy.

2.14 The Information evening events continue to be held online monthly and are open for anyone thinking about becoming a Foster Carer. These are advertised on our Web Page, Facebook and My Nottingham, details are also sent out to everyone who enquires with us. Prior to the Covid restrictions these events were face to face, but the new guidelines required us to create a safe and effective way to continue to recruit Foster Carers, so we moved our events online, via Zoom. These regular events are not the same as face to face but can be more accessible, so we are now looking to have a mix of face to face and virtual events , A Foster Carer attends the event and talks about their own experiences of Fostering. Members of the Fostering Team are also present to answer any questions and to advise about the assessment process. It is then hoped that once people have all the information they require they will book an Initial Home Visit. We have improved the Initial Home Visits process are now undertaken by Assessing Social Workers who complete a more in-depth initial visit pro-former. This method is proving to be more of an effective screening tool.

2.15 This year (April 22 to March 22) as a result of 163 enquiries we approved 18 Carers. We currently have a further 4 households in the Assessment Process, and 2 households with Initial Visits booked. We have increased our Panel

capacity by creating 10 additional Panels for the remainder of the year, this is so that applications can be heard within the required 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 to Panel following a Review.

2.16 Nottingham City is in the process of applying for Foster Friendly status as a council, this would help to promote fostering in Nottingham and could attract more carers working for the council to become foster carers.

2.17 The City Council Fostering Recruitment Service continue to work in partnership with 100 Homes / City Prayer. We have renewed this contract and plan the next phase of recruitment for a post for a link worker; the role includes supporting church members in early stages of the recruitment process, and unpicking barriers to recruitment when they arise. There is still significant work to do, to move from enquiries to applications, and despite best efforts from the new link worker, who is also a Foster Carer and Therapeutic Parenting Trainer, barriers remain that warrant further support and commitment, if we are to increase the recruitment of foster carers from the 100 homes programme.

2.18 We have been part of a regional a government funded initiative called A Place to Call Home , to recruit foster carers and Supported Lodging hosts for UASC –A Place to call Home has not been as successful as we had hoped, but we have contributed to feedback to the Governing Board and DfE and it has been agreed that a review will look at lessons learnt and how to ensure the expected further funding is more productive.

2.19 As part of the D2N2 Consortium, we have joined training staff from across the four local authorities to deliver the Skills to Foster Training and widen the offer. We have commissioned Therapeutic Parenting Training, that has contributed to the applicants developing new parenting strategies that children will benefit from. Feedback is positive, and while the training groups are smaller, 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 with our D2N2 partners. We have managed to secure funding to train one of our recruitment workers in therapeutic skill on an accredited course, the plan is that she can then deliver the training without the need to commission this work.

2.20 We continue to experience barriers regarding arranging and completing medicals, these are a statutory requirement for any prospective Foster Carer. However, they are not the doctors priority as they are not part of the NHS system, and are not deemed a medical emergency. Covid made this situation worse with many people not being able to get a face-to-face appointment. GPs did not support our proposal for us to fund a specific GP to undertake these assessments and would not share patient records. We continue to advise applicants to contact their GP as a matter of urgency as soon as they start Stage One of their Fostering Assessment.

Retention Strategy

2.22 Key to retaining foster carers is for the supervising social worker to build a trusting, consistent and reliable relationship with the carer. This has been

impacted by staff recruitment, sickness, and retention challenges. There is a dedicated and experienced team of Supervising Social Workers but instability has had an impact. Recruiting agency staff has also been a challenge to offer capacity during the last few months. This has led to some carers feeling unsupported. We have considered creative ways, using Supervising Social Workers who have retired returning to help with visits to carers as well as new carer's Independent Assessing Social Workers staying in touch and for some undertaking visits and supervision visits.

2.23 Work was completed on the Pay and Progression of Supervising Social workers and is now in the final stages of implementation. It will increase their pay in line with children's Social Workers and will offer a career progression pathway within the service, in the hope that workers will feel valued and stay or want to join the fostering service.

2.24 As part of the revised job descriptions the plan is to look at bringing all fostering assessments in house and develop a model for providing an out of hours service to our carers during evenings and weekends.

2.25 We have a buddy scheme for foster carers, 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 and the buddies offer valuable support during difficult times.

2.26 There is a foster carer support group that is led by a foster carer and supported by the service, that takes place monthly and is well attended. It is a group for carers to meet with or without children in a safe space to build support and friendships. We are also supporting carers to establish a Foster Carer Association in Nottingham City with the support of Essex and Fostering Network. It is hoped this will also act as another forum for carers to help develop and shape the service and have representation.

2.27 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 co-facilitated by CAMHS CiC for foster carers and professionals and offer home visits.

2.28 We have reviewed and updated our Training Programme. In the last 2 years all training courses were run virtually apart from the paediatric first aid course. We were only providing mandatory training as there have been some challenges in the training team in service delivery. With the training team and listening to carer we have devised a new Programme for 22/23 that was well received when shared with Carers recently.

2.29 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 several carers who need this support.

2.30 We have introduced stability meetings for placements that are under pressure, this meeting involves carers, fostering team, child's social work team, the virtual schools representative and CAMHS CiC to look at ways in stabilising placements to prevent placement breakdown.

2.31 A monthly Newsletter is sent out to all carers to give update on what is happening in fostering including training and good news stories. The whole service attends the Fostering Support Meeting held every 6 weeks with foster carers alternating evening and daytime to try to make it as accessible as possible. This is attended by senior managers from all children's teams and the Head of Service and the Virtual School. As well as guest speakers and updates on the Service, much of the meeting listening to the Carers' suggestions and concerns to influence change and progress. Minutes are circulated to assist with better communication.

2.32 Although it has been a challenging year for the service, as it has been for fostering nationally, morale and stability in the team is improving as is performance. Nottingham's' City Council's transformation programme will include a focus on modernising the Fostering Service and investing in the recruitment and retention of foster carers

3 Other options considered in making recommendations

3.1 There are no further options as this is an annual report on activity

4 Finance colleague comments (including implications and value for money/VAT)

4.1 There are no direct financial implications to this report. All placements are closely monitored to ensure robust financial projections

5 Legal and Procurement colleague comments (including risk management issues, and legal, Crime and Disorder Act and procurement implications)

5.1 There are no new recommendations that need legal comments as this is an annual report on activity

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 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)

Yes

Attached as Appendix x, and due regard will be given to any implications identified in it.

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