

Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



Nottingham
City Council

Reference Number:

2738

Author:

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Department:

Children and Families

Contact:

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Subject:

Internal Foster Care Provision

Total Value:

£99,031 (Type: Revenue)

Decision Being Taken:

Last year the Council spent over £11m on external foster care placements. The average cost is approx. £869 p/w compared to the internal cost of approx. £400-£500 p/w. Current 58% of placements are external which is unsustainable. We need to invest in people, processes and tools to streamline and improve the way new/potential foster carers come into our internal system - giving a greater 'customer' experience. This will help with our Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy and Retention Strategy.

We have identified key areas where improvements can be made:

* **Website and Digital Strategy** - our website needs development to meet the standards of key market leaders, including more elements that are emotive and demonstrate a clear offer of the wide-ranging services provided.

* **A Customer (People) Strategy** - we need a more cohesive strategy for attracting and keeping people who enquire about fostering over the time it takes to go from an initial enquiry to an eventual foster care placement. Additional sales, marketing and team management expertise is critical to the success of this strategy, focussing on people, training, resources and targeted sales campaigns to develop a professional service.

All of this will help to attract, recruit and retain foster carers - which is better for the council and better for the children and young people in our care.

Reasons for the Decision(s)

Last year the Council spent just over £11m on external foster care placements. In order to improve our Internal Foster Care offering we need to explore the opportunity to develop a commercial business model in order to compete with external agencies and generate savings to support and manage the growing number of Children entering care. The average cost of an external placement is approx £869 p/w compared to the internal cost of approx £400-£500 p/w. Currently 58% of placements are external.

The findings from a recent benchmarking exercise highlighted the following key areas of weakness:

Website - The website appears bland in comparison to key market leaders and is akin to other services provided by the Council compared with competitors' websites that are emotive and demonstrate a clear offer of their wide ranging services provided.

Sales & Marketing Strategy - There is a lack of resource and limited sales and marketing experience. Competitors will have experienced teams that are often aggressive in their sales approach in order to ensure their business is viable.

The introduction of additional marketing and team management expertise is critical to the success of this strategy. These key roles will lead on all aspects of the sales and marketing agenda including:

- Focused campaigns
- Recruitment of additional resource supported by the necessary training to develop a fit for purpose professional service.

'Children in Care' is a service that is particularly emotive and heavily regulated. There are a number of limitations that safeguard a child's wellbeing and prevent a child from simply transferring placements. In order to maintain the Council's credibility, any changes must meet the required governance whilst ensuring targets are realistic and achievable within these confines.

Other Options Considered:

Do Nothing - this option is not possible due to the number and associated costs of external placements and their impact to the fostering budgets. The invest to save project is critical in delivering the required savings as part of 'Strategic Choices' to help address the current overspend supported by the early intervention measures introduced to maintain a relatively stable level of numbers of children in care.

Background Papers:

None

Published Works:

None

Affected Wards:

Citywide

Colleague / Councillor Interests:

None

Consultations:	Those not consulted are not directly affected by the decision.
Crime and Disorder Implications:	None
Equality:	EIA not required. Reasons: It's not anticipated that citizens will be adversely impacted in terms of the protected characteristics by the proposals. The website will provide all the accessibility features available on the current NCC Fostering webpage. Teams will apply all procedures in terms of employment contract requirements for equalities and disabilities. The programme team leader will monitor access and action any concerns identified
Relates to staffing:	Yes
Decision Type:	Portfolio Holder
Subject to Call In:	Yes
Call In Expiry date:	24/02/2017
Advice Sought:	Legal, Finance, Human Resources
Legal Advice:	<p>Employment-related Legal Advice</p> <p>Under Section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, any appointments to posts referred to in the proposed decision should be made on merit.</p> <p>Advice provided by John Bernard-Carlin (Team Leader) on 09/01/2017.</p>
Finance Advice:	<p>£99k 2016/17 upfront investment to be funded through partnership contributions.</p> <p>Future Years costs are to be covered by the savings delivered Isolated financial and non-financial monitoring is required to measure the success of the investment.</p> <p>Advice provided by Christine Green (Senior Commercial Business Partner) on 11/01/2017.</p>

HR Advice:

This report recommends investment to the Fostering & Adoption Service. The spend is focused on marketing and update of the website. Management will need to ensure that the Team Manager role is evaluated through the Council's Job evaluation Scheme, and apply the new terms & conditions that are effective from 1 April 2017. Whilst this is a permanent post, management will still need to consider any possible exit costs, should the future funding of the post, put the role at risk. This would include any financial risk of redundancy and access to pensions benefits. As outlined in the legal comments, all recruitment should be undertaken using the Council's recruitment practices, particularly around 'safer recruitment'.

Advice provided by Lynn Robinson (HR Business Partner) on 31/01/2017.

Signatures

David Mellen (PH Early Intervention and Early Years)
SIGNED and Dated: 16/02/2017
Alison Michalska (Corporate Director for Children and Adults)
SIGNED and Dated: 16/02/2017