

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – JULY 2019

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:	Audrey Taylor – Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption audrey.taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Sarah Bartlett – Principle Fostering Recruitment Manager Luke Impey – Principle Fostering Manager	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)	N/A	
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	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, as of May 2019, over 8,500 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.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

- 2.1 The Council has 619 children in their care as recorded on 1 May 2019. These are the most vulnerable children in the City, some of them known to services for some time,

and many with complex needs. The majority of these children (450) 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 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 Council foster placements for 52% of the required placements (recorded at end of May 2019). This is an increase from only 39% recorded in April 2017. We are working hard to further reduce the reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 2.3 Many of our foster carers live in the City or the County. We prefer to recruit more carers living locally so that our children have more opportunities to continue relationships with friends and have the option to remain at the same school if appropriate. We prefer to place children and young people who need foster care with our own carers rather than with an Independent Fostering Agency, which may be further away and increases the risk of disrupting established relationships. Independent Fostering Agencies also incur a much higher cost to the Council, as we have to pay the additional Independent Fostering Agency fee.
- 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 and many will continue to have regular contact with their families. It is more economically viable for support and contact to be maintained with local foster carers. A foster placement with our own local foster carers can help the child to have a better quality contact. With less travel time required the child is often less anxious.
- 2.5 Statutory visits by the child's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Workers are more efficient when the child is placed with local Council foster carers. Communication is often easier for the child's Social Worker and the Fostering Supervising Social Worker because they work for the Council. Any successful placement is dependent on good communication between the staff concerned and to be able to get accurate information quickly is key to giving all those involved the best support possible. This will definitely help the child feel that we care deeply about them and will work hard to ensure they get the best possible service. A successful placement needs to be supported well. The support to the placement is easier to put in place when all professionals work in the same department, as support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the Virtual School, and Targeted Support are all delivered from the same Council or linked Agencies.

Recruitment Strategy

- 2.6 The Council has a recruitment strategy 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 is the right plan for them. We currently have two 0.5 dedicated Customer Service Officer posts for Fostering. They are the point of contact for any prospective foster carer from the application stage through to approval. Every 3-4 weeks, Information Evenings are held at Loxley House for anyone thinking about Fostering. These events 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 often have young people who have been in foster care presenting their views and this is the most powerful part of the evening. Potential applicants hear directly from the young person as well as receiving advice about what makes a successful placement. We also promote Fostering Services on Facebook, Twitter and on the Council website. The web pages are in the process of being refreshed as we recognise that more and more citizens research Fostering on-line before making contact with the department.

- 2.7 May 2018 saw the first Fostering Sunday, which was when many churches across the City highlighted the need for more foster carers in the city as part of their sermons and other activities. This was part of the 100 Homes campaign, a joint initiative between the Council and Nottingham City Prayer, a group of Nottingham Church Leaders. Nottingham City Prayer have pledged to recruit 100 Fostering households for the City Council from local churches over a 3-year period. The second Fostering Sunday was held in May 2019 and the intention is that it becomes an ongoing annual fixture in the calendar of Nottingham churches. Also that several information events will be held throughout each year in churches.
- 2.8 Since the 2018 Fostering Sunday, several Fostering information events have been held in churches around the City, which have been well attended, and to date has seen 17 households being approved, with several more in the recruitment process. Two of the Fostering households recruited via the campaign to date are church leaders, one of whom is a very vocal advocate for Fostering.
- 2.9 Part of the 100 Homes campaign was the installation of 619 pairs of children's shoes on the steps of the Council House, to highlight the number of children in care and the need for more foster carers. The shoes were collected by several city churches. The installation attracted significant media coverage, including coverage on BBC East Midlands news. Facebook posts about it were shared hundreds of times and seen by tens of thousands of people. Feedback indicated that many people had been moved by the installation as well as being curious as to what it represented. Many enquiries about Fostering were made as a result.
- 2.10 We have been working with the Indian Community Centre Association to highlight the need for more foster carers in the City that reflect our community. This involves the distribution of Fostering literature through Gurdwaras, Temples and other institutions, plus the sharing of social media posts.
- 2.11 We are also in partnership with is the Nottingham Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Network (LGBT). They provided lots of support promoting LGBT Fostering and Adoption week in March 2019. The Fostering Recruitment Team Leader was subsequently made LGBT Network Champion for the year, which will allow for further opportunities to promote Fostering within this community.
- 2.12 Other target groups the Fostering Recruitment Team has engaged with include the Police Federation and Schools. There are plans to work with the NHS and other healthcare/social care organisations in order to target those with the skills and experience that overlap with Fostering.
- 2.13 In addition to the activity set out above there is a range of on-going work. This has included further development of social media content, which resulted in several posts going viral. The most successful of these in terms of impact was a short video of a foster carer telling a very powerful story involving taking a foster child to the beach for the first time. This was shared over 200 times and was seen by over 30,000 people.

The Fostering Recruitment Team regularly attend local events such as the Riverside Festival, and Pride to promote Fostering.

2.14 In June 2017, we appointed a dedicated Recruitment Consultant and a Fostering Project Officer to assist with Recruitment on a one-year contract. These posts have now been made permanent. In addition, in March 2019 we successfully recruited a part time Fostering recruitment team manager. The capacity of the team has grown enabling us to create a stronger more effective process that has already improved the journey for applicants and has started to enhance our reputation. A target of a net gain of 15 Fostering households was set for 2018-19. We have exceeded this, with a net gain of 20 household, with 37 approvals set against 17 resignations. In 2018-19, the Council recruited 37 Fostering households, which is the highest figure of any local authority across the Midlands.

2.15 Recruitment Performance

Month	Marketing Activity	Foster carers				Fostering beds				Child placements			
		Enquiries	ROI	Approvals	De-regts/resign	Month	Connected person Placements	Mainstream placement	NCC	IFA	Month	NCC%	IFA%
Jul-18	Police retirement event School staff event - Bluecoat School staff event - Forest Fields Nottingham Pride	35	11	1	1	Jul-18	33	185	218	245	Jul-18	47.08%	52.92%
Aug-18	Riverside Festival	45	6	4	0	Aug-18	30	165	195	238	Aug-18	45.03%	54.97%
Sep-18	2 x info events at Loxley	31	3	2	3	Sep-18	28	179	207	239	Sep-18	46.41%	53.59%
Oct-18	100 Homes Q&A event - Trent Vineyard	25	8	4	1	Oct-18	31	175	206	238	Oct-18	46.40%	53.60%
Nov-18	100 Homes event - Grace Church	30	3	2	3	Nov-18	31	171	202	238	Nov-18	45.91%	54.09%
Dec-18	Facebook xmas "this time next year" promotion	31	4	1	0	Dec-18	31	171	202	238	Dec-18	45.91%	54.09%
Jan-19	2 x info events at Loxley Adrian Beard Facebook viral video	51	5	2	0	Jan-19	35	183	218	226	Jan-19	49.10%	50.90%
Feb-19	100 Homes event - Calvary Church LGBT Network events	21	2	7	3	Feb-19	39	187	226	225	Feb-19	50.11%	49.89%
Mar-19	Paula Smith Facebook viral video	25	4	4	1	Mar-19	41	177	218	217	Mar-19	50.11%	49.89%
Apr-19	100 Homes Q&A event - Trinity Church	26	5	4	3	Apr-19	44	182	226	218	Apr-19	50.90%	49.10%
May-19	Market Square Shoes Fostering Sunday	55	3	3	2	May-19	40	176	216	219	May-19	49.66%	50.34%
Jun-19	100 Homes event - Trent Vineyard	19 to date	2 to date	2 pending	0	Jun-19	34	184	218	218	Jun-19	50.00%	50.00%

Retention Strategy

2.16 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. We are in the process of increasing the team of Supervising Social Workers to ensure foster carers are supported and reflect our success at recruiting more internal carers. Our foster carers are regularly and formally reviewed where any changes to their status can be discussed and agreed.

2.17 We run Support Groups for foster carers in Clifton and Lenton, where foster carers can meet with other foster carers in their area. 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 of it.

- 2.18 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.
- 2.19 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. The Virtual School regularly attend business meetings to address any issues in relation to education that carers may have. Other services that attend periodically are Independent Reviewing Officers and the Placement Service.
- 2.20 In addition to internal services, partner agencies also attend business meetings. This year 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. We have also had presentations from the service that provides advocacy and Independent Visitor schemes.
- 2.21 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. We have incorporated foetal alcohol syndrome and transitions into adulthood training.
- 2.22 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.
- 2.23 Works Perks is an employee benefits scheme where staff can choose from over 6000 lifestyle discounts, we have recently extended this to include foster carers. This can include discounts at well-known shops, cinema, discounted holidays and travel, and local offers from businesses. We consulted with foster carers, and most foster carers have received their ID badges to access the scheme.

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

7.1 An EIA is not required because 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.