

18th June 2018

Agenda Item: 14

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK****FOSTERING SERVICE: ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2017 TO MARCH 2018****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides information on the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from April 2017 to March 2018.

Information

2. The number of children in the Council's care has increased over the last year from 771 (March 2017) to 807 (March 2018). Of the 807 children in the Council's care, 630 are placed in foster care (78.07% compared with 78% at the end of March 2017). Of these 630 children, 388 (62%) are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire County Council. 38% are placed with an independent, external foster care provider. These figures present an increase of children placed with internal foster carers since April 2017 to March 2018 from 58% to 62 %, and a decrease in the number of children placed with external providers from 42% to 38%.
3. Of the 807 children in the Council's care, 388 are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire County Council. This equates to 48% of the total looked after population. This is an increase of 2.61% in internal fostering provision since April 2017.
4. The internal fostering service is the Council's highest provider of placements at the lowest cost.
5. There has been an increase in demand for Family and Friends Regulation 24 assessments under the 2010 Care Planning Placement and Review Regulations. The 2011 Fostering National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services also apply. From April 2016 to March 2017, there were 107 referrals to the Family and Friends Team. From April 2017 to March 2018, there have been 126 referrals. This represents an increase of 15%. Of the total number of children placed in the Council's care, 24 are placed with family and friends carers. This equates to 4% of the total number of children placed with internal fostering providers. Despite undertaking significant assessments of family and friends carers, relatively few remain as approved foster carers. This is for a number of reasons; children may be rehabilitated back to their parents' care, carers may withdraw from the assessment process or carers may go on to achieve Special Guardianship Orders/ Child Arrangements Orders. This is the main factor in why foster carers do not remain within the Fostering Service.

6. The expansion of internal fostering is being considered as part of the Review of Children's Care.
7. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is the core activity and focus within the Fostering Service. There was an increase in the number of households approved at fostering panel; 32 households were approved in 2017/18 compared with 25 in 2016/17.
8. The Council terminated the approval of nine foster carers. Of these nine, five were de-registered following allegations/concerns of a safeguarding nature. There was a further loss of six family and friends fostering households due to Special Guardianship Orders being granted. There were a further 16 foster carers who resigned during 2017/18. Of these 16, five resigned following investigations into concerns. The remainder were due to family circumstances/reaching retirement age. This is a higher than average number, which meant a net gain of one fostering household.
9. In terms of recruitment, the performance for 2017/18 has seen a slight decrease in recruitment activity. There were 134 enquiries made which resulted in 128 initial visits. However, of these visits only 32 households proceeded to fostering panel and were approved as foster carers. Recruitment of foster carers remains a significant challenge.
10. Foster care recruitment is currently very challenging and this is a national trend. The Fostering Service works very closely with colleagues from the Council's Marketing and Communications Team to develop the service's recruitment and retention strategy. Recent initiatives include a half day recruitment day for Fostering Service and Marketing and Communication Team colleagues to look at key recruitment drives. Information events are held around the County on a regular basis, including evenings. It is hoped that the frequency will be increased. This activity is further supported by the advocacy group of carers who attend local events to discuss and promote fostering.
11. In 2016, Fostering Support Officers were recruited to the Fostering Service. There are five Fostering Support Officers based in Fostering Teams around the County. They were recruited in order to support Supervising Social Workers and foster carers. Fostering Support Officers have enabled Supervising Social Workers to focus on the key tasks of assessment and supervision of foster carers. The addition of the Fostering Support Officers has been a positive addition to the Fostering Service. This has been endorsed by feedback from both Foster Carers and staff within the Fostering Service.
12. The children and young people for whom there is a continued struggle to find placements are teenagers and siblings groups. The Council's marketing campaigns reflect this.
13. The Fostering Service has strengthened its support strategy to foster carers and children who foster. A Sons and Daughters Council has now been established and a fifth annual event took place in October 2017. The contribution of the foster carers' birth children to the outcomes for a fostered child has long been appreciated and recognised.
14. The Fostering Service has a good reputation in respect of the support it provides to its foster carers. The service continues to engage foster carers in service developments and continues to support its foster carers in their professional development and professional identity through a varied programme of learning, training and developmental opportunities.

15. As part of the service's commitment to supporting the development of foster carers, work is currently taking place with Nottingham City to look at potential joint training ventures. The aim is to share resources and further enhance foster carer developmental opportunities.
16. The Fostering Service is a service for children. The profiles of children who wait for a long term foster family have been featured on the local and regional family finding sites as well as a national site. Due to the complex needs of some of these children, progress is limited but there is a work-stream dedicated to promoting this work. The focus is particularly on the needs of young people currently living in residential care. This has resulted in a positive outcome for a young person who is in the process of transitioning from a residential care home to live with a foster family on a long-term basis.
17. The Council is committed to celebrating the achievements of looked after children and young people. The Fostering Service recently held its third annual 'Fostering's Got Talent' event at which 11 acts performed. The event was attended by looked after children and young people, foster carers and their families and staff from both the fostering and children's service.
18. The Fostering Service has excellent staff retention. The level of passion and commitment the staff demonstrate is outstanding. The service is committed to providing high quality care for children and young people in a family environment and is particularly keen to develop the services offered to children with more complex needs and behaviours.

Other Options Considered

19. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. The report provides an opportunity for the Committee to consider any further actions arising from the information contained within the report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

- 1) considers whether there are any actions it requires in relation to the information on the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from April 2017 to March 2018
- 2) agrees to receive a further report on the activity and performance of the Fostering Service in 12 months and that this be included in the work programme.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 21/05/18)

23. The Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the contents of the report.

Financial Comments (SAS 25/05/18)

24. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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