

8 June 2015**Agenda Item: 12****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****FOSTERING SERVICE: ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2014- MARCH 2015****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides information on the activity and performance of the fostering service from April 2014 to March 2015.

Information and Advice

2. Nottinghamshire saw a rapid increase in the number of children in care during the period 2008 to 2013. The number of children in the Local Authority's care rose from 455 to 901 (April 2013). This created a significant demand, in a relatively short period of time, for placements for these children. The Authority needs to be able to place more children in its internal fostering service and has set a target of increasing its internal fostering capacity by recruiting 160 new foster carers over a three year period (2014-17).
3. The number of children in the Authority's care is still subject to some fluctuation but has stabilised within the range of 841 (April 2014) to 851 (March 2015). Of the 851 children in the Authority's care, 636 are placed in foster care (74.7%). Of these 636 children, 214 (34%) are placed with an independent foster provider and 422 (66%) with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire.
4. There are positive indicators of reduced reliance upon higher cost independent fostering and residential provision. The number of children placed with an independent fostering provider has reduced from 282 (April 2013) to 238 (April 2014) to 214 (March 2015). The number of children placed in external residential provision has also reduced from 89 (April 2013) to 81 (April 2014) to 68 (March 2015). The number of children placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire has increased in 2014/15 from 380 (60%) of all children in foster care to 422 (66%). Internal fostering capacity has increased by 42 placements from April 2014 to March 2015. In a report entitled *Local Authority Foster Placements: Regional and Local Trends in England*, published by a social care research organisation (sufficiency.org.uk) in June 2014, Nottinghamshire was named as one of the top ten performing councils in respect of the number of placements it provides in each of its foster homes (more than 1.6 compared with the national average of 1.3).
5. There have been a number of initiatives which have contributed to this outcome. There has been a proactive and sustained advertising and marketing approach resulting in a slight increase in enquiries to the fostering recruitment team. 705 enquiries were received, compared with 696 enquiries in the period April 2013 to March 2014. The

conversion rate (enquiry to approval) has increased to 9% compared with 8% in 2013/14 and 6% in 2012/13). 66 new foster households were approved in 2014/15, compared with 65 in 2013/14. The Authority lost 26 foster households in 2014/15 so the resultant net gain to the Authority, in 2014/15, was 40 households.

6. Another initiative which has had an impact upon the recruitment of foster carers has been the Authority's promotional activity with foster carers approved by an independent fostering provider. The Authority invited this section of the foster carer community, when care was being provided to a child looked after by Nottinghamshire, to consider a transfer of approval to Nottinghamshire. This initiative resulted in 7 foster households transferring to Nottinghamshire in 2014/15.
7. In April 2014, the fostering service introduced a new fee paid fostering scheme to attract foster carers for children aged 11 years plus. It was anticipated that this would attract appropriately skilled and experienced people to foster an older child and funding was made available for 9 new foster households. This new scheme attracted 3 new foster carer approvals in 2014/15. One household was approved under the 11+ scheme in April 2015 and 3 assessments are currently being progressed but the low number of approvals reflects the challenge in providing foster carers for older children - even when competitive fees are provided.
8. An important factor in supporting the sufficiency of internal fostering provision is the way in which the Authority retains and develops its existing foster carers. The Authority lost 26 foster households in 2014/15 compared with 36 in 2013/14 and 10 in 2012/13. The reasons for people ceasing to foster were choosing to retire (due to reasons of age and/or health); a change in circumstance (relationship breakdown/ change in job and location) and for safeguarding reasons, that is, when the agency did not consider them to be suitable to continue to act as foster carers.
9. In April 2015, there were 372 approved foster carers (245 mainstream; 25 home from home/contract care; 37 support carers; 65 family and friends (31 permanent approval/34 temporary approval). In April 2015, 59 of the 245 mainstream foster homes had vacancies, that is, a vacancy rate of 24% and an occupancy rate of 76%. The social care research (sufficiency.org.uk) reported in September 2014 that the average national occupancy rate was 73%. Nottinghamshire performs slightly above average in this regard.
10. The fostering service has strengthened its support strategy to foster carers and children who foster. In 2013/14 the first county-wide Sons and Daughters event took place with a further event taking place in October 2014. This celebration event will take place on an annual basis as part of the children who foster strategy. The annual event will be organised by children who foster, through the Sons and Daughters Council, with support from staff. The contribution of the foster carers' birth children to the outcomes for a fostered child has long been appreciated and recognised.
11. The fostering service has a good reputation in respect of the support it provides to its foster carers. This is evidenced by a very low level of complaint from foster carers (three formal Stage 1 complaints in 2014/15) and by the level of foster carer retention. The support strategy has continued to be enhanced by engaging foster carers in service developments. Foster carers have been involved in recruitment activity, media interviews

and a group of foster carers have attended consultation forums regarding activity within the transformation programme. The joint team meeting initiative (between foster carers and supervising social workers) was introduced in January 2014 and has proved to be very successful and well received. These joint team meetings will continue in 2015/16. The fostering service continues to support its foster carers in their professional development and professional identity through a varied programme of learning, training and developmental opportunities.

12. The fostering service is a service for children. A changed approach to long term family finding for children in the care system has had mixed results. The profiles of children who wait for a long term foster family have been featured on the online learning and information portal for foster carers and in the fostering magazine (Fostering in Nottinghamshire). These initiatives have identified two internal foster families for children in residential care (one aged 8 years and one aged 7 years. The children who wait strategy will continue in 2015/16.
13. In 2014 there was expansion of therapeutic fostering (fostering futures); and increased provision of long term placements for disabled children (contract care); progress is also being made in establishing the family and friends fostering team. Consideration is being given to establishing an independent review service for foster carer reviews. Two areas of activity are identified within the Transformation Programme for 2015/16 – efficiencies within the allowances/fees that are payable to foster carers and the structure of the fostering service.

Other Options Considered

14. This report is for information only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15. This report is for information only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the information on the activity and performance of the fostering service from April 2014 to March 2015 be noted.

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Constitutional Comments

17. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (SS 20/05/15)

18. 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.

Local Authority Foster Placements: Regional and Local Trends in England, published June 2014 by sufficiency.org.uk (social care research organisation).

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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