

17 October 2023
Agenda Item:12

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CARE, HELP AND PROTECTION

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT - APRIL 2022 TO MARCH 2023

Purpose of the Report

1. The report provides an update on the performance and activities of the Fostering Service for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Information

2. The table below shows that the number of Nottinghamshire looked after children has increased during the last year.

Number of children in the Council's care	
April 2022: 943	March 2023: 967

3. The percentage of children in foster care who are living with a Nottinghamshire internal foster carer has reduced in the last year, as shown in the table below. The internal fostering service remains the provider of placements at the lowest cost.

	Total children in care	Total children in foster care	Living with a carer approved by NCC	Living with a carer approved by an external agency
April 2022	943	527 (56%)	231(25%)	296 (31%)
March 2023	967	495 (51%)	212 (22%)	283(29%)

4. There has been an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) entering the care of the Local Authority as part of the Home Office's mandated National Transfer Scheme (NTS). In April 2022, there were 31 looked after UASC in the care of the Local Authority of which 3 were living with an UASC carer approved by NCC and 16 with carers approved by an external agency. At the end of March 2023, there was an increase to 71 looked after UASC in the care of the Local Authority of which 5 were living with an UASC carer approved by NCC and 21 with carers approved by an external agency. All costs associated with UASC (including fostering fees) are funded under the Home Office grant.
5. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is the core activity and focus within the Fostering Service, to support children and young people in the care of the Local Authority.

6. Nationally the recruitment of foster carers is challenging. In March 2022 the number of approved foster carers from both local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies nationally was 61,360, this is a 4% decrease from the number in 2018 which was 63,815. At present 58% of all carers are from local authorities, this has decreased by 8% since 2018.
7. The Council's Marketing and Communications Team works closely with the Fostering Service on the recruitment and retention strategy. The Recruitment and Assessment team have held regular information events throughout the year, many of which have had input from approved foster carers. In addition, social media is used extensively to promote fostering in Nottinghamshire. All Nottinghamshire foster carers are encouraged to promote fostering for Nottinghamshire County Council with their family and friends. Work has also been undertaken with a charitable organisation to promote fostering via churches in the County to further increase fostering households. The Service is making efforts to engage fostering friendly employers with information events held at their venues, which has included supermarkets, a department store, and a bank.
8. The Service recruited 22 foster carers, of which 14 are mainstream foster carers (some with preference to provide support care) and 8 Family and Friends (connected person) foster carers.
9. The Council follows National Standards when assessing and reviewing its foster carers, which includes all foster carers having an annual review undertaken by a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer.
10. Outcomes for children fostered by Nottinghamshire foster carers are generally positive, the Council provides high quality supervision and support to its foster carers, ensuring foster carers access relevant training event and are provided with support, advice, guidance and challenge when necessary. Ensuring that looked after children are safe is the Council's highest priority. One of the strengths of the Fostering Service is that it works closely with the children's Social Work teams and the Independent Reviewing Officers to identify any issues and deal with them swiftly and appropriately.
11. During 2022/23, the Council terminated the approval of 4 foster carers following concerns. In addition, 8 foster carers resigned following concerns being raised about them.
12. 7 foster carers left the Fostering Service due to becoming Special Guardians to the child in their care via a Special Guardianship Order or through adoption. 27 foster carers left for other reasons, which includes retirement and personal reasons which could not have been prevented.
13. The children and young people for whom there is a continued struggle to find placements are teenagers and sibling groups. Child specific adverts have been used to attract potential foster carers for some younger children in residential care and for children with more complex needs.
14. The Fostering Service has a good reputation locally in relation to the support provided to foster carers. The Service continues to engage foster carers in service developments and continues to support its foster carers in their professional development and identity through a varied programme of learning, training, and developmental opportunities. There is a clear

training pathway for the first three years for newly approved foster carers. The Fostering Service promotes relationship-based therapeutic approaches and benefits from having a qualified therapist and therapeutically trained family workers. This is positive for foster carers who have been supported to develop their resilience and practical skills they need during difficult periods. The approach supports foster carers to understand the effects of early life trauma on children's development and how to use their relationship with a foster child to help them heal. Being playful, accepting of the whole child, curious and empathetic (known as PACE), is the key to building a therapeutic relationship and the service has embedded this approach in the foster carer community over the years. Further therapeutic parenting training for staff and foster carers will be provided during 2023-24.

15. The fostering service is now providing pre-approval training to foster carers as part of D2N2 regional collaboration; this is for applicants who are completing the assessment process to become foster carers. This has been well received and includes specific training sessions for family and friend foster carers. Planning for post-approval training is now underway with neighbouring councils which will provide more flexibility in terms of dates and times for foster carers.
16. The Council is committed to celebrating the achievements of looked after children and young people. The Fostering Service held its annual 'Fostering's Got Talent' event at which 8 acts performed; many people attended including Councillors, looked after children and young people, foster carers and their families and staff from both the fostering and children's services. The winner and foster carer received tickets to watch the live semi-final of 'Britain's Got Talent'.
17. The Fostering Service has experienced some changes in staffing due to retirements and vacancies. The level of passion and commitment within the Service remains high; the Service is committed to providing high quality care for children and young people in a family environment. As part of the foster carer's annual survey, they were asked how they would rate the 'Level of support from the Supervising Social Worker' (0-5, with 5 being the best). 97% of carers rating this area either 4 or 5 (83% of these being a 5). This is a good indicator that foster carers value the support of their Supervising Social Worker (SSW). The second highest rated area was the 'Quality of the support from the fostering team' with an overall 83% of carers rating this area either 4 or 5.
18. In line with the national shortage of foster carers the Fostering Service understands the importance of retaining foster carers. During 2022-23 the Council increased its fostering allowances from April 2023 to support its foster carers and ensure that fostering allowances remain competitive with private providers and neighbouring local authorities.

Other Options Considered

19. To not bring this report to the Panel: this option is discounted because this report provides information that forms an important part of the Panel's remit in assisting the Council in fulfilling its legal corporate parenting duties and acting as an effective corporate parent.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. The report provides an opportunity for the Panel 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

- 1) That the Corporate Parenting Panel considers whether there is any feedback that it wishes to give and any actions that it recommends in relation to the information contained in the report.

Amanda Collinson
Service Director, Care, Help and Protection

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Ty Yousaf
Fostering Service Manager
T: 0115 0115 97 72516
E: ty.yousaf@nottsccl.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (GMG 11/09/23)

23. This report falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel to consider (see Section 7, Part 2, paragraph 36 of the Council's Constitution on page 125).

Financial Comments (VC 12/09/23)

24. There are no additional financial implications arising from the 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.

CF0106