

21<sup>st</sup> June 2021

Agenda Item: 8

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL  
WORK****FOSTERING SERVICE: REPORT FOR APRIL 2019 TO MARCH 2021 AND  
NATIONAL MINIMUM FOSTERING ALLOWANCES FOR FOSTER CARERS  
2021/22****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides information on the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from April 2019 to March 2020, as the annual report last year was postponed owing to the limited number of Committee meetings held due to Covid-19 restrictions. The report also provides information for the period April 2020 to March 2021.
2. The report proposes that Nottinghamshire County Council continues to pay its foster carers the National Minimum Fostering Allowances, at the rates prescribed by the Department for Education. Allowances are payments made by the Local Authority, to its foster carers, for the living costs of fostered children.

**Information**

3. The table below shows that the number of children in the Council's care has increased over the last two years.

<b>Number of children in the Council's care</b>	
April 2019: 877	March 2020: 923
April 2020: 929	March 2021: 996

4. The percentage of children in foster care who are living with a carer approved by the Council has increased in the last two years, as shown in the table below, although the percentage figure has decreased in the context of the overall number of children looked after by the Council increasing.

	<b>Total children in care</b>	<b>Total children in foster care</b>	<b>Living with a carer approved by NCC</b>	<b>Living with a carer approved by an external agency</b>
March 2019	875	658	403 (61%)	255 (39%)
March 2020	923	664	405 (63%)	259 (37%)
March 2021	996	717	437 (60.9%)	280 (39.1%)

5. The internal fostering service is the Council's highest provider of placements at the lowest cost.
6. During April 2020 to March 2021, the Family and Friends Fostering Team accepted 101 referrals, compared with 88 referrals for the previous year, as part of Regulation 24 (the temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer) assessments under the 2010 Care Planning Placement and Review Regulations. The percentage of children living with family and friends carers is 7%, which is consistent with 2019-2020. Despite undertaking a significant number of 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.
7. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is the core activity and focus within the Fostering Service and recruitment continues to be challenging, with lots of competition from private providers. The service has seen an increase in the number of households approved at fostering panel; 34 households were approved in 2019/20 compared with 27 in 2018/19 and 32 in 2017/18. This comprised 23 (8 more than 2018/19) mainstream applications and 11 Family and Friends applications.
8. For 2020-2021, the Council has recruited 55 new foster carers, of these 21 are Family and Friends 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, are provided with support, advice, guidance and, when necessary, challenge. Ensuring that looked after children are safe is the Council's highest priority. During 2019/20, the Council terminated the approval of three foster carers following concerns. For the period 2020-2021 the Council terminated the approval of three foster carers following concerns, and four foster carers resigned following concerns being raised with them. One of the strengths of the Fostering Service is that they work 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. Special Guardianship Orders were granted to nine Family and Friends fostering households which is a positive outcome for the children in securing permanence during 2019-20 and seven during 2020-2021.

12. In terms of recruitment in 2019/20, there were 152 enquiries made (that were recorded on Mosaic records) compared with 121 during 2018/19, which resulted in 123 initial visits. For 2020-2021, there were 127 enquiries made and 112 initial visits.
13. Nationally the recruitment of foster carers is challenging. The Council's Marketing and Communications Team works very closely with the Fostering Service on the recruitment and retention strategy. The Recruitment and Assessment team has been facilitating weekly virtual information events for most of 2020 and 2021, which has included input directly from other 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.
14. 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. This method of recruitment has been successful on a number of occasions and has attracted potential foster carers to request to be assessed.
15. Retention of foster carers continues to be challenging with the service losing a total of 40 foster carers during 2019/20. This includes foster carers resigning, retiring, being deemed no longer suitable to foster and leaving the service having secured a legal order to provide the child/young person in placement permanency. For 2020-2021, 36 foster carers left the fostering service.
16. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the Council was unable to facilitate the annual Sons and Daughters event for foster carers' birth children, host the Fostering's got Talent showcase, or facilitate a fostering conference. It is planned to re-commence all three events for 2021-2022.
17. 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, which includes a clear training pathway for the first three years of their fostering career. The service is training all of the Council's foster carers in therapeutic parenting approaches, as a therapeutic fostering service is developed. Supervising Social Workers and fostering team managers have also been trained to ensure a consistency in the approach to managing behaviour and developing relationships in the same methods and approach to benefit the Council's looked after children.
18. The fostering Family Support team was created within the Fostering Service in April 2020. The team provides a range of relationship-based therapeutic interventions, specialist training and consultancy for children in care and foster carers. The team consists of 1 Team Manager, 6 Fostering Family workers, 1 Dyadic Development Psychotherapy Clinical Practitioner and 2 Training Coordinators.
19. The team provides attachment focused interventions underpinned by Play, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy (PACE) and Dyadic Development Psychotherapy originally developed

by Dr Dan Hughes (Child Psychologist and founder of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy).

20. The team provides many areas of support including sleep and routines, behaviour management, therapeutic life story work, support with eating, self-harm, diet, risky behaviours, self-esteem and helping children to explore their feelings.
21. During April to August 2020 the team delivered six-weekly therapeutic training courses focusing on: Therapeutic parenting vs Standard parenting, De-escalation / Promoting Positive Behaviour, Proprioception (regulation and selfcare), and Emotion in the Brain (understanding Fight, Flight & Freeze). These sessions were scaled back to some extent due to the need to focus on the Promoting Resilience and Recovery through therapeutic relationships mandatory training which continues to be delivered to foster carers.
22. In line with the vision to develop the service as a therapeutic fostering service, fostering managers and staff from the looked after and permanency teams have been trained in therapeutic approaches. A key task for the team during the period covered in this report has been to provide the same training to foster carers. The training provides an in-depth look into the early attachment experiences that children form with primary caregivers and exploration of the restrictive effects of negative early attachment experiences and comparison to secure relationships formed in early years and pre-birth. The training provides insight into those thoughts, feelings, communications, behaviours, and interpersonal exchanges that some children have learned to suppress or avoid, magnify and exaggerate as a result.
23. The Fostering Service has experienced some changes in staffing due to retirements and vacancies. The level of passion and commitment within the service is outstanding. The service is committed to providing high quality care for children and young people in a family environment.

### **National Minimum Fostering Allowances for Foster Carers 2021/22**

24. The Children Act 2004 (Section 49) introduced new powers for the Government to compel local authorities to pay foster carers at prescribed rates.
25. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 2006, the Department for Education and Skills announced the recommended rates for the National Minimum Fostering Allowances for Foster Carers. These rates were effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007. The Council has previously agreed to pay the recommended rates each year since 2007. Prior to March 2011 other additional/specific fostering allowances and fees to foster carers were annually inflated by the rate of inflation as determined by the County Council.
26. The report proposes that the Council continues to pay its foster carers the National Minimum Fostering Allowances, at the rates prescribed by the Department for Education for 2021-2022. These allowances are payments made by the Local Authority to its foster carers to cover the costs involved in looking after a fostered child. Nottinghamshire currently pays its foster carers a weekly allowance of £135 (for a child aged 0-4 years), £149 (for a child aged 5-10 years), £170 (for a child aged 11-15 years) and £198 (for a child aged 16-17 years). The weekly allowance, as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, will increase to £138 (child 0-4 years), £152 (child 5-10 years), £173 (child 11-15 years) and £202 (young person 16+).

## **Other Options Considered**

27. No other options have been considered.

## **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

28. The fostering service is required to complete an annual report on its performance and to agree payments to our foster carers.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

29. 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**

30. The increase in the National Minimum Fostering Allowances rates the Council pays its foster carers will be contained within the overall 2021/22 Fostering budget.

## **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 2019 to March 2021.
- 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.
- 3) gives approval for Nottinghamshire County Council to continue to pay foster carers a weekly fostering allowance, as detailed in **paragraph 26**, at the national minimum rates, as prescribed by the Department for Education.

**Steve Edwards**  
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### **Constitutional Comments (EP 20/05/21)**

31. The recommendations fall within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee by virtue of its terms of reference. If Committee resolve that further actions are required it should ensure that such actions are within its terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 24/05/21)**

32. The increase in the National Minimum Fostering Allowances rates the Council pays its foster carers will be contained within the 2021/22 fostering budget for child specific payments which is £3.999m.

### **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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