

17 July 2017**Agenda Item: 9****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK****FOSTERING SERVICE: ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2016 TO MARCH 2017****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides information on the activity and performance of the fostering service from April 2016 to March 2017.
2. The report also seeks approval to provide recruitment packs to Elected Members to support their engagement with fostering recruitment in their electoral divisions and for a further report be brought to the Committee in six months on foster carer recruitment and retention.

Information and Advice

3. The number of children in the Council's care has decreased over the past year from 839 (March 2016) to 771 (March 2017). This is due to a large number of young people exiting 'looked after' services as they become 18. Of the 771 children in the Council's care, 601 are placed in foster care (78% compared with 73.9% at the end of March 2016). Of these 601 children, 350 (58%) are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire County Council (compared with 66.6% in March 2016). 251 (42%) are placed with an independent foster provider (compared with 33.4% at the end of March 2016).
4. Of the 771 children in the Council's care, 350 are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire. This equates to 45.39% of the total looked after population. The internal fostering service is the Council's highest provider of placements at the lowest cost.
5. The expansion of internal fostering is being considered as part of the Review of Children's Care.
6. In 2016 a change was made to the way specific or additional living costs were paid for fostered children. In place of a range of weekly payments and discretionary awards a weekly fostering supplement of £10 per week was added to the fostering allowance to reduce the inefficiency and inequity of individual requests. This has saved considerable officer and administration time.
7. 25 foster households were approved in 2016/17 compared with 52 in 2015/16. The Council terminated the approval of 5 foster households in 2016/17 and 4 foster households submitted their resignation - a total loss of 9 foster households. The resultant

net gain to the Council in 2016/17 was 16 households compared with 43 in 2015/16. The primary reason for terminating foster carer approval was for safeguarding reasons. In one family there were concerns about domestic violence, in three families there were concerns about carers' ability to meet the emotional needs of the children and one "family and friends" placement it was identified that they would not meet fostering standards.

8. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is the core activity within the fostering service. The performance in 2016/17 is indicative of very positive retention activity but less positive recruitment activity. From March 2016 to March 2017 534 enquiries were received, resulting in 155 initial visits, compared with 232 initial visits in 2015/16. Foster carer recruitment is currently very challenging and this is a national trend. The fostering service works closely with colleagues from Marketing and Communications to develop the service's recruitment and retention strategy. Recent developments include a Facebook page dedicated to Nottinghamshire County Council Fostering, an advocacy group of carers who will spread the work about fostering for Nottinghamshire and a new online portal to provide information and advice to foster carers.
9. The children and young people for whom there is a continued struggle to find placements are teenagers and siblings groups. Our marketing campaigns reflect this. There is also an identified particular need in the Mansfield and Ashfield areas. As a result this was the focus of the Council's campaign in this area during Foster Care Fortnight (8-21 May 2017).
10. 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 fourth annual event took place in October 2016. It is planned that this celebration event will take place on an annual basis as part of the children who foster strategy. 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 the level of foster carer retention. 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.
12. As part of the service's commitment to supporting the development of foster carers a rolling programme of joint pre-approval training with Nottingham City has been embarked on. The aim is to share resources and to ensure that new foster carers have peer support as they start their career.
13. 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.
14. Nottinghamshire County Council is committed to celebrating the achievements of looked after children and young people. Fostering recently had its second annual 'Fostering's Got

Talent' event. Ten acts performed and the winning act was a very moving poem about the life changing impact of fostering for one young person.

15. The fostering service has excellent staff retention. The level of passion and commitment the staff demonstrate is outstanding. The fostering service is part of the 'Review of Children's Care' and seeks to expand internal fostering. The review will lead to an attractive foster care offer, for recruitment purposes. 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

16. This report is for information only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. This report is for information only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. 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 services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, 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

That:

- 1) the information on the activity and performance of the fostering service from April 2016 to March 2017 be noted.
- 2) the fostering service provides recruitment packs to Elected Members to support their engagement with fostering recruitment in their electoral divisions.
- 3) a further report be brought to the Committee in six months on foster carer recruitment and retention.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 04/07/17)

19. The recommendations in the report fall within the Terms of Reference of the Children and Young People's Committee.

Financial Comments (SS 16/05/17)

20. 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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