

**17 June 2019****Agenda Item: 6****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL  
WORK****FOSTERING SERVICE: ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2018 TO MARCH 2019****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides information on the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from April 2018 to March 2019.

**Information**

2. The number of children in the Council's care has increased over the last year from 807 (March 2018) to 875 (March 2019). Of the 875 children in the Council's care, 658 are placed in foster care (75.2% compared with 78.07% at the end of March 2018). Of these 658 children, 403 (61%) are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire County Council. 39% are placed with an independent, external foster care provider. These figures present a slight decrease in percentage terms, of children placed with internal foster carers since April 2018 to March 2019 from 62% to 61% and an increase in the number of children placed with external independent fostering agencies by 1%.
3. Of the 875 children in the Council's care, 403 are placed with a foster carer approved by Nottinghamshire County Council. This equates to 46.06% of the total looked after population. This is a decrease of 1.8% in internal fostering provision since April 2018.
4. The internal fostering service is the Council's highest provider of placements at the lowest cost.
5. The Family and Friends Fostering Team accepted 79 referrals 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. Of the total number of children placed in the Council's care 19 are placed with family and friends carers. This equates to 4.7% of the total number of children placed with internal fostering providers, which is a marginal increase on last year. 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.

6. The expansion of internal fostering is being progressed as part of the Review of Children's Care with additional posts being recruited to establish a Recruitment and Assessment Team.
7. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is the core activity and focus within the Fostering Service and recruitment continues to be challenging. There was a decrease in the number of households approved at fostering panel; 27 households were approved in 2018/19 compared with 32 in 2017/18. This comprised 15 mainstream applications and 12 Family and Friends applications.
8. 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.
9. Outcomes for children fostered by Nottinghamshire foster carers are 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 2018/19, the Council terminated the approval of three foster carers following concerns of a safeguarding nature.
10. Special Guardianship Orders were granted to 23 Family and Friends fostering households which is a positive outcome for the children in securing permanence.
11. In terms of recruitment in 2018/19, there were 121 enquiries made, compared with 130 during 2017/18, which resulted in 115 initial visits, compared with 133 during 2017-18.
12. Nationally the recruitment of foster carers is very challenging. The Council's Marketing and Communications Team work very closely with the Fostering Service on the recruitment and retention strategy. Regular information events are held around the County, including at evenings and weekends. It is planned that the frequency of recruitment events will be increased. An advocacy group of carers attend local events to discuss and promote fostering. 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.
13. Following recent new investment agreed by the Committee, the Council's support package for foster carers is being strengthened and the fostering allowance is being increased, which should help in retaining and attracting more carers. A dedicated recruitment and assessment team has been established and will provide an immediate response to enquiries to become foster carers.
14. The children and young people for whom there is a continued struggle to find placements are teenagers and siblings groups. An ambitious focused recruitment campaign is currently being developed and will be rolled out later in the year.
15. 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 sixth annual event took place during summer 2018 at the Mill Adventure Base. The contribution of the

foster carers' birth children to the outcomes for a fostered child has long been appreciated and recognised.

16. 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.
17. 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 can be limited but there is a work-stream dedicated to promoting this work. Child specific adverts are being produced to attract potential foster carers for some younger children in residential care, where it is deemed that their longer term needs would be better met in a foster placement.
18. The Council is committed to celebrating the achievements of looked after children and young people. The Fostering Service recently held its fourth annual 'Fostering's Got Talent' event at which 12 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.
19. 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 expanding with a new recruitment and assessment team being established.

### **Other Options Considered**

20. No other options have been considered.

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

21. 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**

22. 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**

23. 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 2018 to March 2019
- 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.

**Steve Edwards**

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### **Constitutional Comments (EP 23/05/19)**

24. The Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report. If Committee resolves that any actions are required, it must be satisfied that such actions are within the Committee's terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 05/06/19)**

25. 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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