

Report of the Director of Children's Services to the meeting of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 27 September 2017.

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Subject:

Progress of the Fostering Service

Summary statement:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the progress of the fostering service noting the positive direction of travel

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Portfolio:

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1. SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the progress of the fostering service and the improvements that have been achieved across the service over the last 6 months.

2. BACKGROUND

2.2 The purpose of the Review was to enable the Fostering Service to improve outcomes for looked after children by:-

- Enhancing placement provision
- Creating financial savings through efficient structures and processes.
- Improving service provision and process
- Increasing the pool of foster carers
- Being proactive in placement management.

2.3 The Review acknowledged that the Service faces challenges and needs to respond to the changing needs of children becoming looked after; the government's austerity programme and the increasing pressure to improve the outcomes for looked after children.

2.4 The management, organisation, funding and key activities that deliver the service were considered as part of the Review.

2.6 The Review also examined if the current supply of foster carers is adequate, rates of recruitment and retention, methodology for recruitment (marketing), processes and barriers to becoming foster carers.

2.7 It incorporated a review of the journey of a foster carer from initial enquiry to approval to identify any unnecessary barriers and make the process less intimidating and more efficient.

2.8 The Review acknowledged that the key challenge is to create an enhanced pool of in house foster carers which reflects local needs. Providing a larger pool of foster carers will enable better placement matching and choice. More suitable placements will reduce the cost and disruption caused by placement breakdowns. Facilitating more in house placements will reduce costs and enable children to remain within their geography (if desirable.) It will also allow funding to be moved to other areas which will sustain further benefits by down streaming support.

2.9 Key recommendations from the Review

2.9.1 **Capacity, Recruitment and Marketing**

(1) Whilst the national trend is for declining interest in fostering, the decline in Bradford seems to be greater. It was noted that in a nine months period from April 2016 to December 2016, 295 enquiries were received from potential foster

carers. Of these 49 went on to home visits, 9 registrations and 5 taken to panel for approval. The conversion rate is approximately 1.7%, significantly below the national average of 12%. During this same period there were 15 de registrations resulting in a net reduction of 10 foster carers.

- (2) The Review advised that the service must recruit more in house foster carers and recommended that an investment is required to improve the recruitment process. It was suggested that these funds need to be used to appoint a relationship and retention officer and to plan and implement a new marketing/recruitment strategy. The Review recommended that all marketing collateral and channels need to be reinvigorated. Additionally, it was recommended that assessment and recruitment need to be separated as activities. In order to promote fostering opportunities, the Review recommended that clear and concise information needs to be produced on the fostering package. This needs to include payments, support and training. Moreover, the Review reinforced the importance of Bradford council becoming a fostering friendly employer and setting an example to encourage local business and the public sector to do likewise.
- (3) The Review reflected that the central theme of the fostering process is that there should be no compromise on safe recruitment and the safety of the child is paramount. An efficient process for children in care is important to ensure capacity and to plan for the best outcomes for a child. Moving children out (or keeping them out) of the foster care system will protect the capacity of the system.
- (4) The overall principles should be:
 - To keep children out of the foster care system where alternative approaches exist.
 - Where a child needs temporary fostering while alternative options are explored, then those options should be considered as quickly as possible.
- (5) A more proactive approach to securing permanent solutions (adoption, SGOs etc.) will also keep capacity available.
- (6) A priority for the service would be to keep children out of the fostering service, minimise their requirement for fostering services and to achieve permanency at the earliest opportunity.

2.9.2 Data and Communication

- (1) The fostering service holds good quality data which meets the needs of national government bodies. The data is presented in the form of reports and dashboards. However, a number of issues were considered within the Review as follows.
- (2) The Review recommended that data needs to be used more to input into strategic thinking; key data should be brought together into a dashboard that is available to all staff; marketing data will support effective decision making and

planning.

- (3) The Review indicated that foster carers should be encouraged to input into changes to the service through surveys or working groups and that the principle of corporate parenting should be included in member training and SLT briefings. Additionally, the Review promoted the need for a programme of member briefings to be offered to all the Elected Members
- (4) Within the recommendations is further action to engage with foster carers including setting up new forums and meetings involving the leadership of senior managers in Children's Services.
- (5) The Review stated that BAFA should be promoted to new and existing foster carers as an independent network of support and advice; new officially sanctioned networks need to be created, both virtual and real to improve communication, information and respect; refreshments/food should be reinstated for training events and foster carers encouraged to network as part of the training.
- (6) Notably, the Review signalled that all documentation in the service needs to be revisited, duplication eliminated and all documents to be up to date and available on line and in particular that the update of the handbook needs to be completed.
- (7) The Review recommended that improvement needs to be managed through an action plan and reviewed regularly through the Change Board. An action plan is now in place and progress regularly monitored on its implementation.

2.10 **Progress on the action plan**

2.10.1 **Marketing**

- (1) Since the fostering Review, a £100K transformation fund has been provided to the fostering service to reinvigorate the marketing of the service. Prior to this, the service had a budget of £10K per year.
- (2) A full time Recruitment and Marketing Officer is now working within the service and has taken full responsibility for stage one of the fostering processes up to a fostering assessment commencing. This change and published information about fostering rates has seen a surge of interest in Fostering in Bradford.
- (3) The Recruitment and Marketing Officer has developed a recruitment plan alongside the service manager which initially had a target of 50 new fostering families within the year. The Service has joined a regional campaign 'You Can Foster' which has been advertised widely both through billboard campaigns and radio and TV adverts.
- (4) The Fostering data pack which is sent out to interested parties has been re written.. Anyone showing an interest in fostering will receive follow up calls from officers to ensure we keep their interest. The on line presence of the service has

been reviewed to ensure that when a search is undertaken for fostering in Bradford the LA service is at the top of Google search lists. The service has reviewed its social media presence and strengthened its Facebook and Twitter platforms.

- (5) The Service is represented at all major events in Bradford, for example, the team had successful days at the Dragon Boat Festival, Sky Ride event and Saltaire Festival. Senior managers have assisted at these events with branded clothing and leaflets.

2.10.2 Recruitment & Assessment

- (1) The service has revised its telephone service for those interested in fostering. The 'You Can Foster' campaign and website directly relay people into the service. All applicants are invited to information evenings. The Service is now holding information evenings once a month at Margaret McMillan Towers. These evenings are supported by the Deputy Director and Head of Service.
- (2) The information evenings have been revised to include current foster carers meeting with prospective carers, a revised presentation by senior managers followed by a question and answer session. The presentation actively promotes the positives of fostering for Bradford and answers many of the myths that people have about why they cannot foster, for example age, gender, experience and identity. The initial fostering application is then completed by those attending if they wish to progress. The evenings have averaged around 15 – 20 families attending on a regular basis. The service has a target to respond effectively after an information evening to visit prospective carers at home within two weeks.
- (3) The assessment team is now tasked with holding between 6 -10 assessments at any stage and has a target of completing an assessment to foster panel within 20 weeks. This target has halved the timescales linked to assessments in Bradford.
- (4) At the start of the year the target was to recruit 50 new households within the year, it is now felt that it may be possible to exceed this target in this financial year. The current service manager has put in place a reporting framework with the Team Managers to ensure that there is oversight of the assessment workload to track progress in this area.
- (5) The team are currently at capacity and since April 2017, 39 new fostering households have been approved by panel. This consists of:
 - 5 new mainstream carers
 - 31 Connected Persons
 - 2 early permanence placements
- (6) This improvement is significant and is a direct impact of the marketing activity and revised reporting arrangements in the teams.

2.10.3 Engagement

- (1) The Fostering review highlighted the impact for foster carers of the changes that have taken place across the service in the last two years and reinforced that re-engaging with foster carers is key to delivering a successful service.
- (2) As a result the service has planned face to face meetings with foster carers to be clear about what the review highlighted and the progress that is being made. The first event was entitled 'It's About You' and was an opportunity for the Deputy Director, Head of Service and Service Manager to talk directly and engage with foster carers. The event was well attended and positive feedback was received from the group.
- (3) The Foster Care Awards were held in July 2017 and were a great success, over 70 foster carers attended the ceremony. Long service awards were well received and for the first time an exceptional carer award was given. Three foster carers were in the running for this. The Lord Mayor, Lead Member and Director of Children's Services spoke at the event.
- (4) The next wider Fostering event will be the Fostering Charter and Handbook launch on the 14 September 2017. Again senior managers will assist with the running of the morning.
- (5) Monthly coffee mornings have been established and hosted by Supervising Social Workers these informal sessions have proved very positive in establishing peer support groups across out fostering cohort.
- (6) Regular meetings are now tabled with BAFA and GMB who both represent a number of foster carers.
- (7) There has been a clear shift in how we are promoting and supporting fostering in Bradford which is being positively received by the fostering community.

2.10.4 Support

- (1) A detailed training plan is underway to deliver the 'model of care' across placements for children who are looked after.
- (2) Based on attachment theory and the principles of DDP (dyadic development psychotherapy), PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy) is not a method, but rather a way of thinking and communicating. Adopting a PACE approach helps children and young people with emotional regulation by creating a therapeutic day-to-day environment where they feel secure. It also supports carers to stay open and engaged when faced with distressed and dysregulated behaviour.
- (3) Over the last 18 months as part of the Journey to Excellence and the New Model of Care for Looked After Children in Bradford, we have worked hard to train, develop and support PACE practitioners in order to help us embed the PACE approach. The priority group for this training is children's residential

managers and workers and at least one foster carer in each household. We estimate this to be approximately eight hundred people that need to complete the six week courses, this will mean running sixty five course. Over 50 fostering household have already ben trained on PACE.

(4) Significant progress has been made to achieve this vision.

- 84 practitioners have attended the introduction to PACE
- 24 practitioners have attended DDP level 1
- PACE practitioner support group established
- 18 practitioners have attended DDP level 2 training
- 15 practitioners have attended the Foundations for Attachment Training for Trainers
- Using a PACE approach with Children Looked After
- Foundations for Attachment has seen four six week courses been delivered to mixed groups of residential and fostering staff

(5) Over 50 fostering households have received this training offer and are starting to report an impact within the relationships with young people.

(6) All supervising social sorkers will carry a caseload of approximately 21 foster carers this will include both new and experienced carers. A reporting framework is being developed to ensure that the service can report on the number of visits to foster carers and the outcome of the visits. There are currently no unallocated cases within the service. It is a priority to ensure that every foster carer has an annual review and any that are outstanding are dealt with as a priority.

(7) The service structure is being reviewed to ensure that appropriate resource is in place to address each element of the service. Short term and long term teams and disparity between mainstream and connected person's carers has been removed with generic fostering teams being created across the service. The aim being that the same standards of support should be in place wherever you are allocated within the service.

(8) There may be a number of citizens who do not explore fostering due to their current housing situation. It is proposed that changes to the councils allocations policy for social housing will mean that foster carers and adopters approved by the Fostering and One Adoption service will become priority one banding for larger housing. This strategy further support carers in being able to care for Bradford children and improves our recruitment strategy.

2.10.4 Mockingbird

(1) As part of the successful innovation bid by Children's Services, the fostering service has funds to deliver a Mockingbird hub within Bradford. Mockingbird is a model of fostering that has a hub carer at the centre and between 6 – 10 satellite homes as part of the constellation. The young people in the model receive regular sleep overs at the home of the hub carer and the hub carer regularly holds social events for everyone in the hub.

- (2) It is expected that up to 30 children could be in each mockingbird hub. Learning from other authorities has shown that a wide age group within the hub is an advantage and that the hub should be accessible to both mainstream and connected carers. We also hope to link the hub to the specialist homes so at times it may be possible to step a child down from a residential home to a family setting with the additional support of the hub.
- (3) The model is proven to achieve greater resilience in placements and reduce the number of placement breakdowns. Ten local authorities are already delivering Mockingbird and promote its success.
- (4) In Bradford the intention is to have two Mockingbird hubs in place in the New Year. Work is underway currently with Bradford's fostering network coach to develop job profiles connected with the model. The plan is to recruit from the current cohort of foster carers in the District later in the year. The Hub is supported by a dedicated liaison worker who supports the hub carer and satellite homes.
- (5) There is a six stage process to deliver Mockingbird. Currently the service in Bradford is at stage four, recruitment. Stage five and six run concurrently and relate to training for staff at the centre of the model and the constellation carers.

2.10.5 Oversight

- (1) Progress of the fostering review action plan is being reported at the Children's Social Care Internal Change Board and directly to the Deputy Director for Children's Social Care and Assistant Director for Performance, Commissioning and Partnerships.
- (2) A Service Manager has been recruited to the service and will replace the interim in October. A service plan for the next 12 – 18 months will be in place to ensure that all of the outstanding actions from the fostering review are deliverable to a timescale.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 Progress on marketing the service has been achieved with the aid of one off Transformation Funding which is limited to £100k. Budget pressures continue to present challenges as the service is expected to achieve a reduction of £50k in 2018-19. Additionally, the service has inherited responsibility for the SGO (Special Guardianship Order) service and has been required to absorb the associated staffing costs.
- 4.2 In-house fostering is the most cost effective way of accommodating looked after children, it also achieves the most positive outcomes by placing children and young people in a family setting. In house fostering is approximately £300 cheaper than an

independent fostering placement and significantly cheaper than both in house and external children's homes settings. The strategy to grow the internal sufficiency of fostering placements is key to meeting the budget challenges that are faced.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 The best and most efficient outcomes are gained from in-house fostering and there is an imperative to increase the number of approved foster carers in the District. Increasing the number of foster carers will require some additional resourcing as every cohort of 20 foster carers requires a 'supervising' Social Worker.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1 Full consideration is given to any relevant statutory instruments governing the implementation of any of the proposed actions in the plan at all times and legal advice sought as necessary

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Children and young people in need of foster care are of all ages and backgrounds. Some have suffered from abuse or neglect and they need the support of foster carers from all walks of life who can offer a stable home environment. The council is seeking to ensure that in a period of financial constraint it can continue to provide high quality, affordable foster care. A key element of this is to ensure the supply of suitable foster carers, on an ongoing basis. By growing and improving the pool of foster carers looked after children have better prospects of securing a placement that best meets their needs

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Fostering is a process where a foster carer looks after children and young people who cannot live at home with their own family for a variety of reasons. They could be with a foster carer for a few days or a few years until they reach adulthood. Foster carers improve the life chances of the child by listening to their needs, providing a stable home life and providing a safe and secure home environment.

By having a larger pool of foster carers along with a good knowledge of the child's needs and the skills of the foster carers the following benefits are anticipated:

- Increased placement stability;
- Higher level of in house placements;
- Better geographic placements;
- Fewer placement breakdowns;
- Enhanced awareness of fostering services and the council's role as a corporate parent;
- Reduced costs;
- Long term benefits from improved outcomes including reduced NEETs and reduced homelessness;
- A more streamlined service for recruiting foster carers.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

None.

7.6 TRADE UNION

A more streamlined service for recruiting foster carers has been created with the addition of a temporary post of Recruitment and Marketing Manager supported by a Community Resource Worker.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

None.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

8.1 None.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 Not applicable.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That progress on the implementation of the action plan for the Fostering Service be noted.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

12.1 None.