

Report of the Strategic Director, Children's Services to the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 11th April 2018.

AN

Subject:

Progress of the Fostering Service

Summary statement:

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the progress and development of the fostering service and the changes introduced since the appointment of the new Service Manager on 23rd October 2017.

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Health and Wellbeing

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

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1. SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the progress and development of the Fostering Service and the changes introduced since the appointment of the new Service Manager 23rd October 2017.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Fostering Service had an internal review, published in March 2017. The Review concentrated on the management, organisation, funding and key activities that deliver the Fostering Service being:

- Data Set
- Sufficiency
- Process
- Finance

2.2 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.

2.3 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.

2.4 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.

2.5 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.)

3 Progress since the last report

3.3.1 Marketing

(1) The council agreed a £100K transformation fund in 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 Manager was appointed early October

2017 on a temporary contract (until October 2018). The manager has a lead role in marketing and communications, both external communications with Bradford district citizens and internal communications with foster carers, and has taken full responsibility for the enquiry stage of the fostering process up to a fostering assessment commencing.

(3) Working alongside the Recruitment & Marketing Manager, a Community Resource Worker (CRW) has been appointed on a temporary contract (until March 2019). This has supported the Service with the recruitment activities undertaken to attract new foster carers. The CRW has a key role in organising the information meetings and other events as well as maintaining and managing the relationship between the Fostering Service and the enquirer to ensure the enquirer remains engaged and the Fostering Service remains on track to hit deadlines. The CRW is also taking on some marketing activities, such as running the Fostering Service's Twitter account, setting up a carer blogging group, helping to deliver the Skills to Foster group and supporting some initial assessment activity.

(4) The Recruitment and Marketing Manager is developing a marketing and recruitment plan and continually revises the operational objectives according to current demand alongside the new Service Manager.

The Service joined a regional campaign 'You Can Foster', which has been advertised widely through social media, street side posters, radio and TV adverts.

Our statistics show that to date for 2017-18, the campaign has generated 100 enquirers, of which 4 have progressed from initial enquiry (1 is at home visit stage; 2 got to home visit stage but are no longer in the process and 1 is in assessment but on hold due to personal circumstances).

There are currently 28 households still in active enquiry stage.

Bradford has shown the best return on investment in the Yorkshire and Humberside region so far with 1.9 enquiries per 10K in the population, compared to Leeds (1.4 per 10K), Kirklees (1.3 per 10K) and North Yorkshire (1.45 per 10K)¹.

Many people enquiring about fostering are considering it for the first time and have a lot of questions about what fostering is and what it actually entails. This explains why there is always a high level of drop-offs. Nationally, the conversion rate of initial enquiry to an initial visit is 26%. Bradford's initial conversion rate is 39% relating to all enquiries and 15% relating to You Can Foster enquiries. The You Can Foster rate is so low because since the last information session, we have just completed a Facebook lead generation campaign and are currently processing about 40 new enquiries.

The reasons behind so many initial contacts not converting in to enquiries are mainly due to the enquirer:

- not having a spare room to foster;
- actually wanting adoption not fostering;

¹ Calderdale has a higher number of enquiries but they paid for additional advertising independently of the campaign, so cannot be comparable.

- language barriers (not having a good enough level of English to be able to support a child in education, record children's activities and work with the teams around looked after children);
 - expressing an interest but not able to foster at this time (life circumstances)
 - initially interested because of financial reasons
- (5) The Fostering enquiry pack, which is sent out to interested parties, has been rewritten and redesigned. Anyone showing an interest in fostering receives follow up calls from the CRW to ensure they remain engaged. The online 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, below paid for ads. The service has reviewed its social media presence and strengthened its Facebook and Twitter platforms.
- (6) 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. Planning for future events has already started and we are looking at the Leeds Pride event, Dragon Boat Festival, summer fetes, festivals, shows and fairs, as well as approaching local businesses such as the Yorkshire Clinic and other large businesses in the area about having a stall in their staff/common rooms.

3.3.2 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 attend an information evening held monthly to hear more about fostering for Bradford. The session includes a presentation by the Deputy Director or the Head of Service and the new Service Manager. Plans are now underway to review these sessions and ideas at this stage are to have separate zones where members of the public considering fostering can hear more about each scheme in more detail and will include the Supported Lodgings Service. The marketing team have been conducting exit consultations with attendees to ascertain if there are any areas of the sessions that need reviewing.
- (2) Each information session is supported by two to three current foster carers and the children they look after. Whole service commitment to supporting the sessions is an expectation; therefore staff from each team in the service attends. The presentation actively promotes the positives of fostering for Bradford and clarifies many of the myths that people have about why they cannot foster, for example age, gender, experience and identity.
- (3) Workers interview and gather initial information during the sessions and highlight any early potential barriers to them fostering. The evenings have averaged around 10 to 15 families attending on a regular basis. However, more recently numbers have increased to between 12 and 18 families, primarily due to the activities being undertaken by the Recruitment CRW.

- (4) The Service Manager has set a timeframe where prospective carers are contacted by an assessment social worker within 3 weeks of the information session (Stage 1) with the aim to set up the initial home visit. To support and track this process, the Service Manager has now set up planning and progress meetings during the same week as the session. This supports a discussion on which enquirers are viable and ready to be progressed to a home visit; which are to be closed down and which need further investigation before a decision is made to move them forwards. There is also an opportunity to clarify roles of who is contacting carers as a follow up to ensure prospective carers are kept well informed.
- (5) The assessment team undertakes all the initial home visits to undertake a Stage 1 assessment and holds 3/4 full assessments at any one time in stage 2. From when the Service accepts a completed registration form, the team manager and team are aware they have a target of completing an assessment within 20 weeks.
- (6) At the start of the financial year 2017/18 the target was to recruit 50 new fostering households. The figure to date has now exceeded this with 71 new households. This is made up of 50 additional connected persons and 21 additional mainstream foster carers.
- (7) This improvement is significant and is a direct impact of the marketing activity and management oversight. Additionally, to meet future demand, the service has now shortlisted 9 social workers from the wider Children's Service who will be 'casual workers' for the Fostering Service. The social workers have already attended an information event about expectations and are available to take work from the month of March. The target although ambitious, for the next financial year is to double the mainstream provision to 42.
- (8) The Service has done some drop in information sessions for Council workers across the District. This has provided an opportunity for council staff to pick up leaflets about Fostering and more are planned in the year.

3.3.3 Engagement and Consultation

- (1) A Fostering event took place 14th September 2017 to launch the revised foster carers' handbook. There was commitment from all senior levels and the event was a great success in bringing carers together to provide updates whilst providing opportunities for networking.
- (2) The Fostering Service has now set a date for the first annual carer conference taking place 23rd May 2018. We will be joined by the Director and Founder of Foster Focus, who himself was brought up in care to deliver a Keynote speech.
- (3) The service has now introduced processes for consultation with carers to guide some of our development work. During February we sent out a questionnaire seeking feedback from carers around placements and support. The questionnaire was sent to 405 carers (mainstream, short breaks and Friends &

Family carers) on the newsletter mailing list and SSWs took out copies on home visits; 37 households responded. Findings suggest that a key area for further development is building stronger relationships between foster carers and the wider Children's Services; ensuring the standards outlined in the Fostering Practice Standards are being met; developing further communication strategies and working more closely with other services in Children's to ensure the needs of children in foster care are being met. The consultation in March is on the training and support to enable a training needs analysis to take place.

The service has also now introduced a mechanism for carers to leave feedback on deregistration. Enquirers are also consulted about the information sessions and we have plans to consult with applicants about the assessment process.

- (4) Quarterly coffee mornings continue to be successful, hosted by Supervising Social Workers from in the service. These informal sessions have proved very positive in establishing peer support groups across our fostering cohort and also include some Yoga sessions.
- (5) Worry Monsters have picked up in pace and the community in the Bradford district has got behind their production. The pace and size of knitting groups has supported social workers being able to put an order in for a worry monster for children they are supporting. The monsters support direct work with children and young people. The children are reassured its ok to have worries, they write them down and pop their worries into the worry monsters mouth and the worries can stay there until they are ready to talk to a trusted adult.
- (6) A monthly newsletter is sent out to all carers and includes key dates, articles of relevance, training information and regular updates around service development from the Service Manager, as well as opportunities for carers to support the service and get involved. Not all carers are actively engaged with the newsletter due to their IT capabilities (newsletter open rates 62% for February 2018). Supervising social workers are asked to take out key documents to their carers when we are aware they do not access online material.
- (7) 8 weekly meetings are now tabled between the Service Manager and with BAFA and GMB union; both groups represent a number of foster carers.
- (8) The service is also in the planning stage of establishing foster carers forums every 2 months. These will support carers with up to date research and knowledge and will include guest speakers.
- (9) The service has set up 'let's talk' twice yearly sessions giving individual carers the opportunity to meet with the Service manager starting in April. This is their opportunity to share what is working well, their concerns and what needs to happen.

3.3.4 Support, standards and processes

- (1) A significant development within the service is the launch of the Fostering Service's Standards of Practice in January 2018. It is a 15 page document which sets out timescales and expectations in relation to practice. It is a

significant development as the service is in a much better position to challenge poor practice when the standards are not being met. The standards include an emphasis on timeliness of carer reviews, visits to carers, assessment timescales and matching children with a long term placement. They also include allegations management timescales where there has been an allegation made against a carer which can result in a carer possibly been suspended until the outcome of the allegation is known and then subsequently a review of them as carers. This can be a difficult time for the carers and so it's important the process has some clear expectations relating to timescales and outcomes.

- (2) The Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service has now been fully revised and is now compliant with National Minimum Standard 16 (NMS, 2011) and Fostering Regulations 3 (2011). There is now a draft version of a Children's Guide and once consultation has taken place with the CICC, we will be in a position to distribute to carers.
- (3) The LCS system continues to be developed to fit the business of the service. To ensure consistency, key assessment templates which have historically sat outside the system in paper form, are now nearing the end of testing to enable all key assessments to be in the LCS. The data intelligence team are also developing a platform where all data for the fostering Service will be available on one platform for all managers to access and check their individual team data.
- (4) The service has now appointed a Independent Reviewing Officer Lisa Noble who started in role on the 12th March. Lisa was previously in the Fostering Service as a Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and so has in-depth knowledge and experience of the fostering processes. Lisa will have a key role in providing independent oversight within the allegations management process and will contribute to carers annual reviews. The role brings compliance with the NMS 22 (2011).
- (5) There is a drive to embed Delegated Authority (DA) now within the service and the wider Children's Service. A decision support tool is now being used at pre and post placement planning meetings and provides clarity on what day to day decisions can be made by a carer in relation to a child in their care. This process is further strengthened by the Children's IRO team as they will review the decisions made at children's reviews and will also challenge if the agreements in this area are not evident on the LCS files. This has been an area of frustration for some carers previously as they have reported feeling under valued and not trusted to make simple decisions for children.
- (6) The Service manager has reviewed the functioning of the Fostering Panels in Bradford and the subsequent decisions that follow from the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The service manager has ensured the following:
 - All fostering panel members and panel chairs have now had their annual appraisals in February 2018. A tracking and monitoring process is now in place.
 - All fostering panel members now have an up to date DBS or awaiting a

renewal.

- There has been a successful recruitment of panel members.
- The service has recently appointed an independent fostering panel chair who will start when the current chair retires in April. The new chair brings a wealth of experience and expertise in fostering which can only be positive in this developing service area.
- Due to the size of the Fostering Service and the business on a day to day basis, there are now 3 Agency Decision Makers (ADM's) across Children Services. There are 3 fostering panels who each sit once a month so there is an ADM attached to each of these panels.

3.3.5 Training for foster carers

- (1) Over the last 2 years 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 Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy (PACE approach). PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe to enable a trusting relationship to develop. 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 800 people that need the course which is delivered half a day a week over a 6 week period.
- (2) Significant progress has been made to achieve this vision.
 - 171 practitioners have attended the introduction to PACE
 - 24 practitioners have attended DDP level 1 (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy- supports relationships between two people)
 - PACE practitioner support group established
 - 18 practitioners have attended DDP level 2 training
 - 15 practitioners have attended the Foundations for Attachment Training for Trainers
 - Staff trained in DDP have had refresher training and will have additional training during the year to support appropriate implementation of the approach
 - 15 staff trained in group work skills, and will lead on groups for carers of teenagers and children with additional needs to provide PACE/DDP informed support to groups of carers.
 - 20 additional staff and foster carers have been trained as co-trainers, to increase capacity to deliver of this programme.
 - Foundations for Attachment has seen 20 six week courses delivered to mixed groups of residential and fostering staff – 240 people in total have completed the course.
- (3) Almost 200 fostering households have received this training and are starting to report an impact within the relationships with young people. Feedback from

carers has been extremely positive:-

"It has been brilliant for us. We started practicing on each other and it has been lovely- as well as helping with the children, it has helped our marriage. Everybody is calmer and we all feel a bit closer"

"I have really slowed down. I stop and think before I speak and don't over react like I used to"

"This course was a revelation. I realised why some of the things I used to do with the older children just didn't work. I get less stressed now and they talk a bit more about what is really going on"

"What is so good about this is that it works with everybody. I try to be 'PACE' with my foster baby and it certainly works with his mum at contact"

- (4) Work is underway to revise the training offer and identify the learning and development which is essential. There is a broad programme available to carers, which includes Safeguarding, First Aid, Recording, Counselling Skills, Supporting Education and Domestic Abuse. As highlighted within this report, we are consulting with carers on what training and development needs they feel they need.

3.3.6 Workloads

- (1) To balance workloads across the full Fostering Service, the Service Manager has now reviewed staffing and resources and made a significant change by joining the Support/Shared Care Team with the Special Guardianship (SGO) Support Team, which was under resourced. Combining the teams has now created capacity to consider our SGO offer in Bradford and a SGO task group will be planned soon to develop this area of the service. Additionally, this change has also provided further opportunity to resource other pressured areas as 2.5 social workers were removed through this change, to other areas including freeing up a social worker to oversee induction of new foster carers. A induction programme is underway.
- (2) A new system of workload allocation is now established with allocations meetings now take place every 2 weeks.
- (3) All full time supervising social workers can carry a caseload of approximately 21 foster carers. It is acknowledged within the service, workload can be variable and cannot be based solely on a number. The service is adopting the case load weighting tool implemented in the wider Children's Services to enable this work to be measured.

3.3.7 Mockingbird update

- (1) As part of the successful innovation bid by Children's Services, the fostering service has now launched the first 2 Mockingbird hubs in February 2018. The model is proven to achieve greater resilience in placements and reduce the

number of placement breakdowns. The model increases support to carers and is a whole family approach with the carer's birth children all being involved too.

- (2) A large recruitment drive took place between September and October 2017 to identify potential hub home carers of which three were shortlisted. Their skills, abilities and attitude was measured against pre-defined criteria from the Mockingbird staff team. We agreed to take two of the hub families forward and kept the third family as 'back up'. All three hub carer families attended the Fostering Network Training Session on 5th February in Halifax.
- (3) Prior to the training of the hub carers, three members of the Mockingbird Staff team visited a Fostering Network conference in London on 1st November and were able to make key links with other local authorities using the Mockingbird Model. Those links remain strong and we are in contact with several LA's including Leeds, Wigan and Rotherham.
- (4) In December 2017 we were able to identify families within a certain geographical distance from the two hub home carers, again we were able to develop a criteria for satellite families and after several promotional meetings and information delivery, we formally reached out to 24 families to invite them into the constellation. After meeting with the families we introduced 12 of them into the model. The idea of having 6 satellite families in each constellation was agreed by the working group. In the following weeks two families dropped out (one was unsure about the model and the second presented a conflicting issue for another child in the constellation). We envisage adding another family to each constellation once we have identified a suitable match.
- (5) Following the implementation of a clear project plan, we were able to complete the final stages of the Mockingbird Delivery process and successfully passed the Mockingbird fidelity test in February 2017, two days prior to our official launch on 4th February.
- (6) On February 12th our data analyst joined the team, he will meet with the Fostering Network analyst on 19th March to develop a monitoring tool to focus on sustainability. On the same day, our liaison worker also came into post and is busy making links with the constellations.
- (7) We continue to meet as a working and operational group monthly, alongside attending fostering network training, forums and meetings. We also run various sub groups and communication opportunities for constellation members, hub carers and key staff members.

3.3.8 Oversight

- (1) Progress of the fostering service is being reported at the Children's Social Care Internal Change Board and to the Head of Service - Through Care and Resources.

4 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 None.

5 FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

5.1 Progress on marketing the service has been achieved with the aid of one off Transformation Funding which is limited to £100k. This has supported the temporary recruitment of the Marketing officer and CRW and has enabled further marketing activity to take place. The fund has also supported the service to recruit casual social workers, to increase capacity to undertake assessments of prospective new carers.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

6.1 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. The Marketing and Recruitment Officer and CRW in this area are both on a temporary contract. There are clear improvements in their area of work but there is a significant risk if the resource in this area could not continue. Capacity has been created by moving staff around the service but Increasing the number of foster carers will require some additional resourcing later in time as every cohort of 20 foster carers requires a 'supervising' Social Worker.

7 LEGAL APPRAISAL

7.1 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

8 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 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

8.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

8.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None.

8.4 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 through more options of placements
- Higher level of in house placements;
- Better geographic placements;
- Fewer placement breakdowns if better matched
- Enhanced awareness of fostering services and the council's role as a corporate parent;
- Reduced costs;

8.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

None.

8.6 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.

9. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

9.1 None.

10. OPTIONS

10.1 Not applicable.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Members are requested to note significant developments in the Fostering Service including areas that were not necessarily addressed in the Fostering Review, due to restrictions on time and the size of the service.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None.

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13.1 None.