

# **Report of the Interim Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 20th March 2019**

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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 and development of the Fostering service and changes in the last year.

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**Portfolio:**

**Children & Families**

**Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Children's Services**

## **1. SUMMARY**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the progress and development of the Fostering Service.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 In September 2018 the Service Manager - Fostering left the Council and the services of a suitably qualified and experienced Interim Service Manager have been secured. The recruitment of a permanent replacement Service Manager is on-going.

2.2 The Ofsted Inspection of the Local Authority Children's Services in September 2018, recommended 10 areas requiring improvement of which there were the following key areas in relation to Fostering Service activity were specifically identified:

Sufficiency of local placements to meet the needs of children in our care.

Completion of mandatory training for all foster carers.

2.3 The Fostering Service faces continuous challenges in identifying and resourcing good quality foster homes for our children and young people becoming cared for by the local authority. However, this is not just a local issue unique to Bradford but reflects the position nationally, not least because most children looked after are accommodated in foster homes.

2.4 In March 2018 the National figures indicated there were 75,420 children looked after of whom 55,200 (73%) were in foster placements. In March 2017, the number of children looked after was 72,670, of whom 53,420 (74%) were fostered. This showed a national rise of 3.8% of children looked after, albeit a stable proportion of children living in foster homes.

2.5 Of significance has been the increase in children becoming looked after is also reflected in Bradford over the same period but at a greater proportion, for example the numbers of children looked after increased from 927 to 987, an increase of nearly double the national rate at 6.5%. Of those, 691 children looked after (70%) were placed in foster homes on 31 March 2018, compared to 634 (68.4%) of children looked after on 31 March 2017.

2.6 An increasing proportion of those children in foster care have been placed with relative or friends, up steadily from 14% in 2014 to 18% in 2018. (Source: DfE). Nationally, 6750 (9%) of children looked after were placed with a relative or friend. In Bradford, 258 (26%) of children looked after were placed with a relative or friend. This is a 2% increase in Bradford from 2017. The figure shows the number of children placed with a relative or friend in Bradford is 17% higher than the national

average.

- 2.7 The approval of foster carers who can offer good nurturing high quality loving homes to our children is of paramount concern. The Fostering Service's recruitment and retention activity is under review and we are, as a service, open to considering the barriers to the people of Bradford becoming or remaining as foster carers. The barriers to becoming a foster carer are different to reasons carers give for no longer fostering. There have been national, regional and local campaigns to address the myths around who can foster since the DfE released its research in 2013: Understanding attitudes, motivations and barriers to adoption and fostering. The myths include marital status; property ownership; previous criminal convictions; age; gender; sexuality; parenting experience; physical abilities. We address these common myths directly and indirectly through messaging used in publicity including the website, social media posts, printed materials and case studies.
- 2.8 Recent national research conducted by The Fostering Network gives insight into foster carers' views of fostering in the UK, including why carers stop fostering. Many of the key findings and recommendations from this research are being addressed by the Fostering Service, including addressing out-of-hours support; re-engaging foster carers through the development of a Foster Carer Charter and re-developing an independent foster carer association.
- 2.9 In April 2019, the Team Manager of Recruitment and Assessment and the Marketing and Recruitment Manager, will review the journey of a foster carer from initial enquiry to approval to make the process less intimidating and more efficient.
- 2.10 Central to the service is a need to recruit, approve and develop skilled foster carers who can meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. This will enable our staff to match our children and young people to local foster carers who we have approved and therefore know their skills and abilities. An increase in recruited foster carers would reduce the cost of external placements. Furthermore, it would enable the service to focus on developing children's permanence plans, whilst keeping them in their local communities and in touch with people who are important to them.

## **PROGRESS SINCE THE LAST REPORT**

### **2.11 Marketing**

1. Following the £100K investment, an appointment was made to a permanent Marketing and Recruitment Manager and a Recruitment Officer.
2. The Marketing and Recruitment Manager has the lead role in marketing and communications, including both external communications with the wider Bradford district and internal communications with foster carers, and has responsibility for the enquiry stage of the fostering process up to a fostering assessment commencing.
3. Working alongside the Marketing and Recruitment Manager is the Recruitment Officer who has been appointed on a temporary contract (until May 2019 with plans to make this a permanent post).

4. The Recruitment Officer undertakes activities to attract new foster carers, including the key role of organising 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 Recruitment Officer has taken on some of the marketing activities, such as running the Fostering Service's Twitter account, helping develop the new fostering recruitment website, setting up a group of carers who support marketing activities including meeting with the Marketing & Recruitment team to develop marketing plans and ideas.
5. The Marketing and Recruitment Manager, alongside the Service Manager, works to an annual marketing and recruitment plan, which is reviewed and revised as per operational requirements based on current foster homes needed for our children, looked after in Bradford. The target for 2018-2019 is an increase to 40 enquiries per month from 30 per month in 2017-2018. This is an 11% increase on enquiries in Bradford compared to the national increase of enquiries of just 3%. The cost per enquiry (CPI) has reduced from £23.15 per enquiry in 2017-2018 to £20.83 per enquiry in the current financial year. The key reasons for the reduction in CPI are more efficient and targeted enquiry generation such as Facebook advertising and the streamlined fostering front door looking after and developing enquiries.
6. New developments include the Emergency Foster Carers scheme, being developed with B Positive Pathways and recruitment of a specialist foster carer to live in the fully adapted bungalow at the Wedgewood facility in Holmewood, who will, when recruited, provide planned short breaks for children and young people with a wide range of complex needs including disabilities and health needs as well as trauma based behavioural issues.
7. The service is working collaboratively with partners across a number of channels locally:
  - a) The Service has signed for another year of the regional campaign 'You Can Foster', which brings together 8 local authorities in this region as well as 23 in the North West to fight off the challenge from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).
  - b) The Service is now working with the Muslim Fostering Network (also sometimes known as Mercy Mission) on an initial 6 month contract, to provide 6 leads to a full assessment from the Muslim community in Bradford that have undergone initial screenings.
  - c) The Service is also working closely with the Welcoming Young Refugees project (Coram BAAF) to identify and recruit new foster carers and supported lodgings providers for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young refugees.

## 2.12 Recruitment & Assessment

Enquiry Stage Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Totals	
1. Having set a target of 40 enquiries per calendar month, in this financial year so far the number of enquiries is monthly target													
No of initial contacts from IFA/OLA carers		1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	*2	8
No at Information Meetings & phone consults		10	13	13	17	0	25	14	19	7	17	14	149

2. The service is on track to increase the number of enquiries from 2017-18 (which was 432 enquiries) by 7%. This is over twice the 3% national rise in the number of enquiries about fostering.
3. From April 2018 to 20 February 2019, 149 households have attended an information meeting, had a phone consultation with an assessing social worker or went straight to next stage (e.g. an IFA transfer).

Following this stage, 101 households were offered home visits after receipt of a positive expression of interest.

Of those not moving to an initial home visit, reasons are commonly:

- Want adoption not fostering;
- 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);
- Solely interested for financial reasons;
- Not having a spare room to foster.

Of those offered a home visit, not all enquirers took up the opportunity. No single reason stands out as a universal barrier. The top 3 reasons for applicants not moving on to an initial home visit are:

- Applicant does not respond to calls / emails (5);
- Not being in the right personal circumstances to foster at this time (3);
- In the process of or planning to move house (3).

4. In the same time period, 74 home visits have taken place, with a further 16 due to take place by the end of March 2019.
5. The national conversion rate for enquiry to mainstream / short break foster carer approvals is 4.19% (source DfE 2019) of 117,335 enquiries to 4920 'stranger' fostering household approvals. Bradford Fostering Service projected conversion rate for 2018-2019 is 5.2% - 25 mainstream / short break foster carer approvals are projected by 31 March 2019.
6. 65 Connected Person approvals that are friends of or related to the child were approved by January 2019.
7. 65 households were de-registered in this current year: 14 mainstream households; 8 short break carers; 29 family & friends' carers as well as 12 family & friends carers that had provided temporary placements but withdrew from the fostering process before approval at fostering panel. There were also 2 back up carers who were de-registered. Reasons for de-registrations ranged from carers' resigned (21 households); SGOs, PR or RO were granted (13 households); child moved out –

either back to living with parents or over 18 (9 households). Of the other reasons, 1 carer moved to an IFA, 2 became Supported Lodgings or Staying Put providers or there was no reason recorded.

8. The Service continues to be represented at all major events in Bradford, for example, the team had successful days at the Dragon Boat Festival and Make Your Mela Day.
9. All staff assisted at these events offering information and providing promotional materials. Future outreach events are being planned more within local Bradford communities such as coffee shops and also larger Bradford events and village fairs.
10. Most importantly we are to work with our colleagues in the Children and Families Teams and Through Care Teams to talk with our children and young people age appropriately to gain their views on what we as a Fostering Service can do to attract the right kind of foster carer to care for them; what would they be looking for in a foster carer whilst living away from their birth families?
11. 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 enquirers are invited to attend an information evening held monthly to be informed and ask questions fostering for Bradford. Future developments include plans to focus on the child's journey and to offer potential foster carers a better insight from the child's perspective.
12. Each information session is supported by two to three current foster carers. The whole service is committed to supporting these sessions; therefore staff from each team in the service attends. The presentation actively promotes the positives of fostering for Bradford and highlights the need for more carers.
13. Workers interview and gather initial information during the sessions and highlight any early potential barriers to them fostering. The evenings have averaged around 15 families attending on a regular basis.
14. Following the session the Recruitment Officer meets with the Assessment Team Manager (generally the day after the meeting) to look over the forms. Potential fostering families with a positive recommendation are reviewed by the Team Manager. The Recruitment Officer will call enquirers the same day to let them know they are moving forward to the next stage. This supports a discussion on which enquirers are viable and ready to be progressed to a home visit.
15. 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.
16. The assessment team undertakes all the initial home visits to undertake a Stage 1 assessment and holds 3-4 full assessments at anyone 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.

## 2.13 Engagement and Consultation

1. On 5 November 2018, the fostering service held its first foster carer conference with Luke Rodgers; a care experienced public speaker as keynote speaker. The conference included the foster carer awards and workshops in subjects that aimed to interest and engage. It was very well received.

## 2.14 Engaging Foster Carers

1. There is a recognition that many Bradford foster carers are disengaged from the fostering service and no longer feel valued. This project has been developed as a response to this concern. The primary objectives are to:
  - Improve outcomes for our children and young people
  - Ensure foster carers feel valued, engaged and respected as professionals
  - Strengthen the relationship between foster carers and staff
  - Ensure that foster carers and fostering team working together as one Fostering Service
  - Impact on the recruitment and retention of foster carers
  - Develop a Charter for Foster Care
  - Form a Foster Carer's Association to meet regularly with Senior Leaders and Elected Members
2. The Service believes that central to influencing a cultural shift within a fostering service is an enhanced engagement with foster carers. The process of strengthening carer involvement sends a message that foster carers matter and that the reason they matter is because they are key to delivering improved outcomes for our children and young people.
3. The service is regularly attempting consultation with carers to guide some of our development work. Recent consultations have been on placements and support and training. Carers who cease fostering for Bradford are also offered an exit interview.
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 focussing on children and young people (confidentially) across our foster carer community and also include some Yoga sessions. Between 10 and 15 carers attend regularly.
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.

## 2.15 Support, standards and processes

1. A significant development within the service was the launch of the Fostering Service's Standards of Practice in January 2018. This 15 page document 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 being 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, which need reviewing on a regular basis in relation to timescales and outcomes.
2. In light of the recent inadequate judgement from Ofsted, the absolute priority of the Fostering Service in the first quarter of 2019 is to assess compliance against legislation and minimum standards and Bradford's Service Standards of Practice January 2018. Initial case audits have been undertaken and this will be followed by a self-inspection.
3. An audit of the fostering service will undertake a complete Service review looking at all aspects of team functioning from recruitment, support for foster carers, managing allegations through to a positive approach to retention and handling resignations. Following on from this will be a detailed Action Plan which I will lead in implementing within six months of the audit. What will result from this detailed work will be a clear understanding of what works, and what doesn't. The Action Plan will detail remedial work to improve things; initially in line with legal requirements but with an aspirational approach to achieving best practice.
4. 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). The draft version of a Children's Guide is now complete and will be ready for distribution by the end of March 2019.
5. The LCS system continues to be developed to fit the business need 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.
6. The service appointed an Independent Reviewing Officer who started in role on the 1 April 2018. This role provides independent oversight and is the designated person

for managing the allegations process. The role brings compliance with the NMS 22 (2011). The post also contributes to the development of the service overall including evaluating and monitoring standards of practice and fulfilling a quality assurance role. This role is being developed to encompass independent scrutiny around foster placement stability by facilitating Stability Meetings at the earliest opportunity when a child / young person, foster carer or professional raises any concern about the future of the placement. The structure and attendance of the meetings is under discussion as part of the on-going 'placement stability task and finish' group and meetings will be introduced as of April 2019.

7. A drive to embed Delegated Authority (DA) within the service and the wider Children's Service was commenced last year. A decision support tool is available 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 needs further strengthening by all involved with the child and can be focussed on in the audit of the service planned for March 2019.
8. The Interim Service Manager is reviewing 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 are involved in professional challenge at Panel Business Meetings. A further meeting to be set up with Agency Decision Makers, Head of Service and Service Manager.
  - Due to the size of the Fostering Service and the business on a day to day basis, there are now 2 Agency Decision Makers (ADM's) across Children Services. There are 4 fostering panels who each sit once a month so there is an ADM attached to each of these panels. On occasions because of the high volume of work due to compliance and Connected Carers assessments an extra Panel a month is being convened. The additional work on the service in this area is ever increasing.

## 2.16 Training for foster carers

1. Over the last 2 years as part of the Journey to Excellence and the New Model of Care for Children Looked After 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”*

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.

## 2.17 Workloads

1. The Service Manager is reviewing staffing and resources across the Fostering Service to make a balanced review of the resources needed in the Friends Family and Connected Persons part of the service and the Recruitment and Assessment Team in streamlining their activity and focussing on assessment work and increase this capacity also. At present, this team complete the support and induction of new foster carers to the service as well as focussing on assessments.
2. Teams supporting foster carers are above the agreed caseloads of 21 averaging

around 24.

## **2.18 Mockingbird update**

1. As part of the successful innovation bid by Children's Services, the fostering service is one year in to supporting 2 Mockingbird hubs since February 2018.
2. The model is proven to achieve greater resilience in placements and reduce the number of children and young people experiencing an unplanned ending in their foster home placement. The model increases support to carers and is a whole family approach with the carer's birth children all being involved too.
3. The official launch of the Mockingbird project was on 4th February 2018. The project is to be reviewed by the social work team and project manager in March 2019 to check against the models criteria. This will include the data analyst where we can review all the care offered to our children against data gathered and analysed.
4. 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.

## **2.19 Oversight**

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.

## **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. This has supported the temporary recruitment of a CRW and has enables 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.

## **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 Bradford. 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.

## **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 on going 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 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;

### **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 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

Elected members to support and promote the importance of fostering in their wards and opportunities for children who are looked after and their carers to access local facilities.

## **7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

None

## **8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

8.1 None.

## **9. OPTIONS**

9.1 Not applicable.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 Members are requested to note significant developments in the Fostering Service.

## **11. APPENDICES**

11.1 None.

## **12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

12.1 None.