

## **Report of the Strategic Director – Children’s Services to the meeting of The Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021.**

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**Subject: Mockingbird Model of Care – Fostering**

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### **Summary statement:**

This report provides members of the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on the implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model in Bradford.

### **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:**

It is crucial that our foster carers and those who are part of Mockingbird reflect our local community in Bradford and the diverse backgrounds and needs of our children in care.

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**Overview & Scrutiny Area: Fostering,  
Provider Services**

## 1. SUMMARY

This report provides members of the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on the implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model in Bradford.

The Mockingbird programme delivers the Mockingbird Family Model. This centres on a “constellation” where one foster home acts as a hub, offering planned and emergency sleepovers and short breaks, advice, training and support, to six to ten satellite households.

The model was originally developed by The Mockingbird Society in America in 2004. Relationships are central to the programme and the hub home builds strong relationships with all those in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown and increasing protective factors around children. The constellation also builds links with other families important to the children’s care plans and to resources in the wider community which can provide them with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Bradford Fostering Service originally engaged with The Fostering Network to acquire the licence to implement the Mockingbird Family Model in 2017/2018. The programme was quickly set up with two ‘constellations’, one for Mainstream foster carers and one for Family and Friend foster carers launching simultaneously. Unfortunately, by 2018/2019 the Fostering Network opted to withdraw Bradford’s licence to run the Mockingbird Family Model on the basis that the fidelity of the model was not being met and as such the two constellations were dissolved and Mockingbird in Bradford ceased.

2.2 The key issues identified upon reflection on this unsuccessful implementation of Mockingbird were:

- Implementation process was rushed with key planning milestones missed
- Leadership of the implementation sat outside the Fostering Services with limited oversight
- The fidelity of the model was jeopardised by utilising Mockingbird carers for emergency respite provision
- There was little awareness and ownership of Mockingbird outside of the small number of professionals actively involved (supervising social workers, direct team manager etc.)
- The structure of the constellations lacked diversity in types of carers, needs of children etc.
- The key professional roles within Mockingbird were not embedded within the establishment

2.3 In February 2020 the service reviewed this learning and determined that the Mockingbird Family Model still had a lot to offer Bradford foster carers and children if implemented correctly. We re-engaged with the Fostering Network and started the implementation process of Mockingbird from the very beginning led by an experienced Mockingbird coach appointed to manage the implementation and maintenance of Mockingbird within Bradford.

- 2.4 The service completed a self-evaluation report which demonstrated to ourselves and to the Fostering Network that the service was ready and able to deliver the Mockingbird Family Model effectively.
- 2.5 An Implementation Working Group (IWG) was established and continues to meet monthly to oversee all decision making and developments in relation to Mockingbird and includes representatives from across Children's Services who are responsible for promoting Mockingbird in their respective service areas as well as contributing to key decision making throughout implementation.
- 2.6 The IWG determined that the two key roles in Mockingbird had to be much more secure than they had been previously and as such the role of Liaison Worker was created as a stand-alone post under its own job profile and fixed in the fostering service staff structure. This did result in some delay whilst the job evaluation process took place and meant that our original planned launch date of late January 2021 had to be moved to early March 2021. The decision was taken that the role of Hub Carer was to be based within the existing foster carer payment structure at Level 4 fee (Specialist Carer rate) rather than a figure calculated outside of the existing fee structure as it had been previously.
- 2.7 The Liaison Worker post was advertised as a non-qualified post and a current Bradford Foster Carer and one of the previous Hub Carers from 2018/2019 was successful in her application.
- 2.8 The role of Hub Carer was opened up to our entire existing foster carer population for expression of interest with many opportunities being provided prior to application to meet with the service so foster carers fully understood the Mockingbird Model and the expectations of the role.
- 2.9 We had a number of applications for the Hub Carer role and following a recruitment process Steven and Dean Sagar-Watson were successful in their applications to be the first Hub Carers and commenced their roles in February 2021.
- 3.0 A further expression of interest process was undertaken to recruit our first constellation families during February 2021. This application was open to mainstream carers only and from this we successfully recruited 7 constellation foster families which encompass 10 children in care aged between 10 months and 15 years and 6 birth children/adopted children of the foster family aged between 8 years and 15 years plus one young adult with learning needs placed under Staying Put. There is a wide range of cultures, ages and needs within the cohort of children and young people providing a good level of diversity within the constellation.
- 3.1 An informal virtual 'constellation launch' was held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and provided a fun opportunity for the constellation families and the hub carers to come together for the first time as a constellation and start relationship building. This was a fun, informal event which included the children and featured a getting to know you quiz and a competition to name the constellation.
- 3.2 On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 the formal launch of Mockingbird took place virtually with the support of Cllrs Farley and Thirkill, Assistant Director, Richard Fawcett and Head of Service, Mark Trinder. The event was opened with remarks from Mark Trinder and

Cllr Farley however we wanted to the primary focus of the event to be on the families and the relationships that were already developing, showcasing the Model at work. Despite having to be virtual the launch was full of warmth, laughter and really encapsulated the essence of Mockingbird. The name of the first Bradford Mockingbird constellation was also revealed as 'Aquarius'.

3.3 The Hub Carers, Steven and Dean continue to work with their constellation and are delivering daily support, advice and guidance to their fostering families alongside training and development opportunities and social opportunities. The sleepover element of Mockingbird is currently on hold due to the pandemic however Steven and Dean are already building their relationships with the children and young people in the constellation in preparation for when we can progress to households physically mixing.

3.4 The service focus now will be to continue to support the development of the Aquarius constellation including recruiting up to 3 more families to join the constellation once the existing relationships are fully developed and embedded as well as beginning to plan for a second constellation with a view to launching this in late Summer, early Autumn this year. The recruitment of constellation families for both Aquarius and the second constellation will be opened up to all our fostering families as well as developing links with our children's homes providing the opportunity for children and young people living there to experience family life and develop social connections with children in foster carer with the potential to facilitate a move to foster care where considered appropriate and to meet the needs of the child or young person.

### **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

➤ None

### **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

➤ None

### **5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

➤ None

### **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

➤ None

### **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

#### **7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

➤ None

#### **7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

➤ None

### **7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

➤ None

### **7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

➤ None

### **7.5 TRADE UNION**

➤ None

### **7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

➤ None

### **7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)**

➤ None

### **7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

Mockingbird can have a significant impact on recruitment and retention of foster carers and on placement stability and is therefore directly related to Corporate Parenting and the role of this committee.

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

None

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

➤ None

### **9. OPTIONS**

➤ This report is for information only.

### **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

➤ This report is for information only.

### **11. APPENDICES**

None

### **12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

➤ None