



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE -
5 MARCH 2018

IN-HOUSE FOSTERING SERVICE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the progress made with expanding and developing the Fostering Service during 2017-18.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The recruitment of mainstream and specialist foster carers is one strand of the Children and Family Service's Sufficiency Strategy, updated annually through [Market Position Statements](#). Both documents set out the Council's approach to providing secure, safe and appropriate accommodation for children in the care.
3. Under the Government's fostering National Minimum Standards (the regulatory framework for the conduct of fostering services) all fostering agencies are required to provide a report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Service and Fostering Panels.
4. At its meeting on 11 September 2017, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee detailing plans to expand and develop the in-house fostering service. This report provides that update.

Background

5. Leicestershire County Council operates an integrated Fostering and Adoption Service. For statutory purposes the provision is referred to as the Fostering Service and the Adoption Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015.
6. In relation to the Fostering Service, there are two primary functions:–

- i) Recruitment of foster carers to increase fostering provision through marketing, assessment and approval;
 - ii) Retention of approved foster carers, ensuring that their training and support needs are met.
7. Growth of the in-house fostering service is key to the Council's strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people who are looked after, ensuring the best placements are identified which meet their needs and promote the best outcomes for this vulnerable group.
 8. Growth of in-house placements is also a key contributor to delivering £2.1 million in financial savings, reducing the use of the Independent Fostering Agency Provision (IFA) and residential provision purchased privately.
 9. When an in-house foster placement is used, the approximate saving is £15,000 per annum per child (compared to the use of an IFA).
 10. When an in-house specialist placement is used, the approximate saving is £110,000 per annum per child (compared to the use of residential care).
 11. The other service activities contributing to savings are adoption and family or friends (also known as connected or kinship) placements. For the purposes of this report, these two activities are not included.

Proposals/Options

12. Work was completed with ImPower, a consultancy agency, in 2016 to understand Leicestershire's population and the local drivers for becoming a foster carer in general and more specifically, a carer for Leicestershire County Council.
13. Since 2016 the Fostering Service has continued to engage with foster carers (current, prospective and those who have chosen not to foster or foster with an IFA) to understand the issue of 'motivation to foster'. This has taken the form of foster carer events, interviews and surveys.
14. Foster carers and prospective foster carers report that when selecting a fostering agency, they do so based on:
 - a. Support and strength of relationships
 - b. Fostering allowances and fees
15. In response to this, the Fostering Service has addressed these issues in their recruitment practices as follows:
 - a) Support and strength of relationships (retention) - foster carers say that they want to feel listened to and involved in how the service is shaped, to make them feel part of a service in which they feel proud.

During 2017-18 the fostering service engaged in a number of activities to address this area, from improving the training offer, improving communication through a regular newsletter, revised locality meetings, a frequent engagement event held at County Hall, events to promote peer interaction and social events to support foster carers such as the day at Bosworth Water Park and craft days.

A second survey was completed in 2017 which showed a marked improvement in foster carer satisfaction across all areas. The Carer Retention Survey with comparative results and plans to continue improvements in this area is attached as Appendix 1.

- b) Fostering fees- At its meeting on 9 January 2018, the Cabinet approved a public consultation on proposed changes to the in-house fostering fee structure. The proposed changes will replace the current fostering fees structure with a new payment framework structure that includes Mainstream Fostering Fees with four levels and Specialist Fostering Schemes.

A more in-depth description of the proposed changes is included as Appendix 2.

16. Full details of the Fostering Service's strategy and targets for 2018-21 will be set out in the Recruitment and Retention Strategy and the Adoption and Permanence Strategy for 2018-21, which will be presented to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the summer of 2018.
17. Essentially these strategies propose an ambitious target of recruitment of mainstream (in-house) and specialist foster carers alongside an ambitious permanence strategy and activity to ensure that only those children who need to be in care long term, remain in care (requiring increased activity for both adoption and family or friends carer placements).

Analysis of recruitment performance 2017-18:

18. Marketing has proven to be successful with a high and sufficient number of enquiries being generated for mainstream fostering campaigns.
19. Enquiries result in a good level of conversion to initial visits (an initial visit is a meeting in the prospective foster carers' home that enables both the prospective foster carer and the Council to gather basic information to assist with the decision of whether or not to progress to the full assessment).
20. Areas of development include:
 - Further improvements to the timeliness of initial visits and decision making to progress to full assessment (called stage 1 and 2 assessment)
 - Further improvements to the timeliness of progression from full assessment to approval

- Ensuring the fostering service has the staff to complete these assessments and support foster carers once they are approved.

21. Priority activities to address these areas include:

- Increasing the Fostering Service capacity to complete initial visits (recruitment is underway)
- Eliminating duplication between the initial visit and full assessment
- Running the stage 1 and 2 assessments at the same time
- Increasing the availability and capacity of the panels which approve prospective foster carers.

Current Fostering Position 2017-18

22. The Fostering Service has an assessment team that completes a range of assessments (fostering, adoption, private fostering and non-agency adoption). In relation to growth in foster carers, at the end of January 2018, 12 new foster carers had been approved; 5 left the Fostering Service (3 retired, 1 resigned and 1 transferred to an independent fostering agency) and 3 more are predicted to leave the fostering service.
23. There are a further 15 prospective foster carers scheduled onto an approval panel between February and May 2018; 5 prospective carers in Stage 2 assessment (not yet scheduled onto a Panel; 3 assessments on hold due to bereavement, illness and an outstanding FBI check.
24. Full details of the Fostering Service's performance in the recruitment and retention will be set out in the statutory report to the Children and Families Overview Committee in the summer of 2018.

The future – ambitious targets ahead:

25. Growth of in house foster placements and the in house fostering service is a key contributor to delivering £2.1 million in financial savings for the Council, through reduction in spend on residential care placements and costly Independent Fostering placements.
26. Targets for growth have been set in the context of the needs of the children in care in Leicestershire. It is an ambitious plan that sets out to increase the numbers of in-house foster carers by 130 over the next 3 years.

The targets for growth are set out below:

	Current	March 2021 Target	Growth over 3 years	Annual Growth
Mainstream foster carers	109	200	80	25(+)
Short Break carers	9	19	10	3 (+)
Foster Carers for Parent and Child	5	8	3	1
One to One Carers (inclusive of Foster Carers to support Wrap Around Therapeutic Support, step down from residential)	5	10	5	2
Pathway Foster Carers (for YP aged 15+)	0	5	5	2
Projected 3 year loss				60
Total Growth Required		242	133	73
Supported Lodgings	19	29	10	3 (+)
Children living with Connected Foster carers (including SGO/COA made in the year)	92	117	25	8(+)

Consultation

27. Consultation with carers and staff regarding the proposed fee structure started in January 2018 and is due to end in February 2018. Members received briefing on this through the Members News in Brief circulated on 18 January 2018. A paper detailing the findings of the consultation will be presented to Cabinet in April 2018.

Resource Implications

28. The ambitious strategy recognises that dedicated focus is needed by officers in both areas of fostering – recruitment and retention.

29. For this reason, a temporary manager has been working with the fostering agency for some months to assist with recruitment. This has enabled the fostering service's permanent Service Manager to maintain focus on retention.
30. Given the success of this approach, the Director of Children and Family Services is considering whether a permanent, dedicated recruitment Service Manager is needed.
31. In addition, as the recruitment success gains momentum, the fostering service will need to grow to ensure that the foster carers have the support they require. For example, by increasing supervising social workers to support, advise and guide foster carers in all aspects of fostering, training, respite care where appropriate and peer support.

Background papers

[Market Position Statements.](#)
[Fostering Annual Report](#)

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

32. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

33. There are no anticipated negative equality or human rights implications arising from this report.
34. It is expected that the proposed changes in relation to fees and the improved offer of support to carers will have a positive impact, enabling the Council to improve the mainstream fostering provision and in turn improving choice and outcomes for vulnerable children.

Appendices

Appendix A – Foster Carer Retention Survey
 Appendix B – Proposed Payment Framework for Foastering

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