

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at
2.30 pm on Monday, 4 February 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member)
Councillor J Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Directorate):

People J Gregg, P Smith

Place S Bennett

Public Business

6. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

7. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October, 2018 were agreed and signed as a true record.

8. Expansion of the Regional Adoption Agency

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which indicated that Cabinet endorsed Coventry becoming part of a Regional Adoption Agency hosted by Warwickshire County Council called Adoption Central England (ACE) on 31 October, 2017. This was a government requirement that was published by the DfE in Adoption A vision for change in March 2016. The Regional Adoption Agency is a shared services model which includes Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Council, Warwickshire Country Council and Worcestershire Country Council. Herefordshire County Council has now applied to join ACE and in order for this to happen, all four local authorities need to agree to the expansion through its own relevant political processes.

The report identified the following benefits of the proposal:-

- An increase in the adopter pool. This will allow better matching to meet each child's needs and a wider geographical region if children need to be placed away from the local area.
- It would allow good practice to be better shared across the region
- It would bring efficiencies of scale which will provide better value in Coventry's adoption service
- It will allow ACE to be more sustainable in the future
- It will give ACE a better profile both regionally and nationally

The adoption performance in Herefordshire County Council was judged by Ofsted as good in the last Single Inspection Framework. It has good statistical

performance which is likely to enhance the performance of ACE. In addition, the size of Herefordshire and its adoption work will make up less than 10% of ACE overall. Therefore agreement for it to join will only have a marginal impact on ACE. Details of the risks to ACE and how the risk was being managed were detailed in the report.

The report indicated that if all local authorities are content to proceed, a target date for full integration is anticipated as 1 July, 2019. There is an implementation grant of £60k available from the DfE to support any initial one-off costs of Herefordshire joining ACE.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People endorses the expansion of ACE to include Herefordshire County Council and delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to sign on behalf of the City Council.

9. **Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided information on the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between April 2017 and March 2018. The performance of the Service is critical to the delivery of high quality local placements that can meet the diverse needs of Coventry's Looked After Children.

The report summarised the activity of the service over the past 12 months. It highlighted the challenge of adequately recruiting and retaining the number and type of carers who can meet children's needs. It also emphasised the challenge of developing, supervising and supporting approved foster carers to meet the often complex range of needs that looked after children have. Additionally, it identifies the growth in the number of children placed in connected persons fostering arrangements. The report detailed the ongoing work of the Fostering Transformation Project to increase the percentage of looked after children who are placed within internal fostering provision.

At the end of March 2018, there were 651 looked after children in Coventry, of which 483 were placed in foster care. Of these, 260 children were placed with Coventry foster carers compared with 223 at the end of March 2017. This included both mainstream and connected persons placements and equates to 53.8% of those children in foster care. Of the 648 children, 223 children were placed with independent fostering agencies, which is a reduction compared to 238 on 31 March, 2017. Of the total number of looked after children, 39.9% were placed with Coventry foster carers, which was a further improvement in this percentage from March 2015, when only 22.8% were placed in internal foster care. Coventry's mainstream foster carers provide an average of 1.6 placements per household. The total number of approved placements on 31 March 2018 was 287. A key focus of the fostering service is to increase the percentage of these placements which are occupied. The percentage of occupied placements has remained relatively static whilst the number of approved placements has risen.

The report provided detailed information regarding the recruitment, approval and resignations of mainstream carers and indicated that there had been a significant growth in the number of enquiries to become a foster carer received in 2017.

Details of support and training provided to foster carers, included the support provided by the Foster Carer Association was also included in the report.

The following priorities for the service going forward were identified:-

1. Continuing work to increase the proportion of looked after children placed in an in house fostering placement
2. Continue to ensure that where appropriate looked after children are placed in connected persons care and that, these arrangements are well assessed and supported
3. Develop the in house specialist fostering scheme
4. Develop an in house out of hours rota of foster carers to ensure emergency placements are available as needed outside office hours
5. Develop provision of and support to parent and child fostering
6. Maintain an aggressive and robust focus on marketing, recruitment and assessment of foster carers.
7. Maximise the capacity of internal foster carers and increase the children placed in internally
8. Review and strengthen the training and development offer to foster carers (to include buddying scheme and support to sons and daughters)
9. Continue to work with children's teams to focus on placement stability
10. Review and relaunch the foster carer support strategy and charter.
11. Provide workshops and team development sessions to children's social workers on working effectively with foster carers.

The Cabinet Member expressed her appreciation of all of the work being done in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People accepts the Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18.

10. **Outstanding Issues**

There were no outstanding issues.

11. **Any Other Business**

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 2.50pm)