



## Agenda

### **Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)**

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**Time and Date**

2.30 pm on Monday, 4th February, 2019

**Place**

Diamond Room 6 - Council House

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**Public Business**

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interests**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 4)
  - (a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2018.
  - (b) Matters Arising
4. **Expansion of the Regional Adoption Agency** (Pages 5 - 12)

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People)
5. **Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18** (Pages 13 - 24)

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People)
6. **Outstanding Issues Report**

There are no outstanding issues.
7. **Any Other Business**

To consider any other items of business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

**Private Business**

Nil

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Martin Yardley, Deputy Chief Executive (Place), Council House Coventry

Friday, 25 January 2019

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Usha Patel, Governance Services Tel: 024 7683 3198

Membership: Councillor: P Seaman (Cabinet Member) and T Skipper (Deputy Cabinet Member)

By invitation: Councillor J Lepoidevin (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Please note: a hearing loop is available in the committee rooms

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OR if you would like this information in another format or  
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**Usha Patel**

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**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Children and Young People held at**  
**3.00 pm on Monday, 22 October 2018**

Present:

Members: Councillor P Seaman (Cabinet Member)  
Councillor T Skipper (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Directorate):

People: L Deakin, J Gregg, S Lam

Place: L Knight

Apologies: Councillor J Lepoidevin

## **Public Business**

### **1. Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018 were noted.

### **3. Outstanding Issues Report**

There were no outstanding issues.

### **4. Children's services comments, compliments and complaints annual report 2017/18**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People), which set out the comments, compliments and complaints received in respect of children's services during 2017/18.

The report indicated that there is a statutory duty for the Council to have a system for receiving representations by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission. The Council is also required to produce an annual report about the operation of the complaints procedure.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, there were 179 statutory and informal complaints received regarding children's services. Of these, 156 were statutory, 12 corporate and 11 informal complaints. This was an increase from 2016/17 when the authority received 147 complaints and 2015/16 when 133 were received.

21 complaints were made by children and young people themselves or by an advocate and the remainder were from adults. Two main themes were identified

arising from the complaints: issues regarding poor communication with users; and concerns about standards of service provided.

During the same time period, 64 compliments were received, compared with 91 in 2016/17 and 68 in 2015/16. Themes from compliments were predominantly around the good standard of practice received from individual social workers and the overall standard of service received from teams.

Appendix 1 of the report set out the children's services compliments, comments and complaints annual report for 2017/18 and highlighted trends and themes that have arisen and the learning and service improvements that have resulted from the feedback received.

Appendix 2 of the report provided the Council's guidance for dealing with complaints.

**RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People approve the publication of the annual report in relation to complaints and representations in children's services in 2017/18.**

**5. Any Other Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 3.20 pm)



## Public report Cabinet Member

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Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

4 February 2019

### **Name of Cabinet Member:**

Children's Services: Cllr Pat Seaman

### **Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive (People)

### **Ward(s) affected:**

All

### **Title:**

Expansion of the Regional Adoption Agency

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### **Is this a key decision?**

No

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### **Executive Summary:**

Cabinet endorsed Coventry becoming part of a Regional Adoption Agency 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 County Council and Worcestershire County Council. The host authority is Warwickshire County Council. The Regional Adoption Agency is called Adoption Central England (ACE).

Herefordshire County Council has now applied to join ACE. Before this can happen all four local authorities need to agree to the expansion through its own relevant political processes.

### **Recommendations:**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is requested to:

- 1) Endorse 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 Council.

### **List of Appendices included:**

None

**Background papers:**

None

**Other useful documents**

The decision to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency was made by Cabinet on 31 October 2017. The background papers are:  
<http://internaldemocraticservices.coventry.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=124&MID=11477#A123584>.

The requirement for all local authorities to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020 is made in Adoption A vision for change published by the government in March 2016:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/512826/Adoption\\_Policy\\_Paper\\_30\\_March\\_2016.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512826/Adoption_Policy_Paper_30_March_2016.pdf)

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

The progress of the Regional Adoption Agency was reviewed by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) on 21 June 2018. It is scheduled for a further review in June 2019.

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

The Regional Adoption Agency is to be discussed by the Corporate Parenting Board on 24 January 2019.

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

## **Report title: Expansion of the Regional Adoption Agency**

### **1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 It is the duty of every local authority to establish and maintain within their area a service designed to meet the needs in relation to adoption i.e. an adoption service. In response, Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Council, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council linked to work towards the creation of a Regional Adoption Agency that has been named Adoption Central England (ACE). The service model was approved by the Cabinets of the four councils between October/November 2017 and the regional service became operational on 1 February 2018. The strategic direction for the service and monitoring functions are met through the ACE Executive Board on which representatives from all the local authority partner agencies and key stakeholders sit including from the voluntary adoption sector. The Executive Herefordshire County Council is presently not part of a Regional Adoption Agency. It has made an application to join ACE because of its close affinity to the local authorities already in ACE in terms of geography and aspiration for children who are to be adopted.

### **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 There are two options to consider: either the application is accepted or rejected
- 2.2 If the proposal is accepted it will bring the following benefits:
- 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
  - Allow good practice to be better shared across the region
  - Bring efficiencies of scale which will provide better value in Coventry's adoption service
  - Allow ACE to be more sustainable in the future
  - Gives ACE a better profile both regionally and nationally.
- 2.3 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. It is also noted that 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.
- 2,4 If the proposal is rejected the current status quo remains.
- 2.5 It is recommended that the proposal to expand ACE, along with the benefits it brings, is agreed.

### **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 3.1 Consultation regarding Herefordshire County Council joining ACE has been on-going. Each individual local authority has fully considered the proposal. The application has been extremely scrutinised by the ACE Executive Board. This includes representatives from voluntary adoption agency colleagues. ACE also has a Stakeholder Group which consists of adopters and practitioner across the area. Therefore, there has been opportunity for a variety of consultation to inform decision making.

#### **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 If endorsed, a project group will be set up to oversee the introduction of Herefordshire County Council into ACE. This will consist a number of work streams including HR, IT and Finance. The progress towards full integration will take place and be signed off by the Executive Board. Herefordshire County Council will only be allowed to fully join once all the current members are satisfied with the progress made. A target date for full integration is anticipated as 1 July 2019 but will only commence once all local authorities are content to proceed.

#### **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services**

##### **5.1 Financial implications**

- 5.1 The ACE Executive Board has been clear that this expansion will not have an adverse financial impact on any of the existing partners and in fact the addition of a fifth partner may increase the potential for economies of scale.
- 5.2 Herefordshire will calculate their existing spend on in-scope adoption services on the same basis that the existing parties to the Host Agreement used, and this information will be used to calculate an average unit cost (£ per adoption). If Herefordshire's unit cost is the same or more than the ACE average unit cost then this will be Herefordshire's contribution for 2019/20 (pro-rated if they join part way through 2019/20). If Herefordshire's unit cost is less than the ACE average unit cost then the ACE Manager will need to consider with the Board and with Herefordshire closing the gap to ensure the financial stability and expected service performance of ACE is maintained.
- 5.3 There is an implementation grant of £60k available from the DfE to support any initial one-off costs of Herefordshire joining ACE.

##### **5.2 Legal implications**

- 5.2.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 is the principal piece of legislation governing adoption and it includes the duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service in their area.
- 5.2.2 The Children and Families Act 2014 allows for the Secretary of State by order to require all local authorities in England to make arrangements for some specified functions to be carried out on their behalf by one or more other adoption agencies.
- 5.2.3 These functions include the recruitment of persons as prospective adopters, the assessment of prospective adopter's suitability to adopt a child and the approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child.
- 5.2.4 Further, the Education and Adoption Act 2016 enables the Secretary of State to require local authorities to make arrangements for their adoption functions to be carried out by a Regional Adoption Agency.
- 5.2.5 Coventry City Council entered into Partnership Agreement on 31 January 2018 and the agreement allows for new local authorities and sets out the process for doing. So long as all partners consent is given and Herefordshire join as a party to the agreement and comply with all the obligations of the Partnership Agreement.



5.2.6 Herefordshire will join once a Deed of Variation to the Partnership Agreement is completed by all parties and Herefordshire.

## 6. Other implications

### 6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan?

The expansion of ACE links specifically into the following areas of the Council Plan:

- Globally connected: this will improve the adoption infrastructure across the region. It will allow Coventry to be part of a wider collective of adoption services that will better promote the outcomes for our children who need to be adopted. In addition, it will give the city the chance to influence adoption practice across the region and even nationally.
- Locally connected: These arrangements will contribute to keeping children who are adopted safe and promote better outcomes. It will mean that children will have a better start in life with families who are better matched to meet their needs on a long term basis.
- Delivering our priorities: These arrangements will allow Coventry to capitalise on economies of scale. It can reduce costs such as management through rationalisation and reducing duplication. For example there is now a single adopter recruitment strategy across ACE and the four local authorities. This means, in addition, a wider pool of adopters will mean that schemes such as a peer led mentor programme is more feasible. This will contribute to local communities being able to support themselves. Finally it contributes to Coventry's desire to work with regional partners and deliver a high quality, cost effective adoption service.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed?

The risks to ACE with this proposal are as follows:

Risk	Mitigation	Risk Management
ACE becomes too large, over a wider geographical area and loses its unique identity.	Herefordshire has a previous identity and experience of collaborative working with Worcestershire. Herefordshire would be the second smallest adoption service within ACE having relatively low numbers of children looked after and adopted children as a consequence.	The strengthening of operational arrangements in the southwest of the region.  Herefordshire fully accepts the ACE model and can easily assimilate into the ACE way of working.
ACE is still within the first 12 months of operations and a new joiner will impact up the progress made to date.	ACE has established itself well within its first 9 months and has sound processes in place and well-founded governance process.	ACE is continually reviewing the way it works in order to ensure that the key outcomes are met –if Herefordshire joins now this will allow opportunities to re-examine ways of working and extend services.
Change can create a dip in performance.	The regionalisation of adoption services is showing evidence of improved performance and the	Herefordshire will be joining ACE as a high performing adoption service with

	relationship between ACE and the local authorities is well established.	practices that are very aligned with those of ACE. Coventry has a close working relationship with ACE which will allow close monitoring of outcomes for Coventry children.
Insufficient adopters to meet the needs of children requiring placement.	The pool of children from Herefordshire requiring placement is manageable and Herefordshire will provide families for existing ACE children.	The Adopter Recruitment Sufficiency Strategy will be reviewed to explore the potential to extend recruitment within Herefordshire and their neighbouring authorities.
Costs associated with change – including IT, legal etc.	The DfE have confirmed that transitional funding will be available and Herefordshire have agreed that this will be allocated between them and ACE.	A detailed and costed transitional plan will be produced for approval by the ACE Executive Board on 14 January 2019.
Staffing loss.	Herefordshire has a small committed staff group of adoption practitioners who are aware that regionalisation is necessary. They have established relationships with staff in the ex-Worcestershire teams and are used to working together.	Herefordshire have a named HR lead and will work with ACE and their staff group in transitioning to the service.  Staff are currently seconded into ACE and this will also apply to Herefordshire staff.
Financial risk to the existing ACE local authorities.	The ACE Executive Board is clear that there is to be no financial cost to them and some costs will in future be shared between five as opposed to four local authorities.	The transitional funding will support one off costs arising from the expansion proposal and a detailed financial analysis is to be received by the Board in January 2019.

### 6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

There is no direct impact on the Council as Warwickshire County Council is the host authority. Therefore, Warwickshire will carry the impact of any potential risk.

### 6.4 Equalities / EIA

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed. At the present time any impact is purely positive. It will extend placement opportunities for children. Further it will strengthen the presence of ACE in the south west of the region easing access for prospective and approved adopters.

### 6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

### 6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

All partner agencies have been consulted where appropriate and all are in favour of the expansion of ACE to include Herefordshire County Council.

**Report author(s):**

**Name and job title:**

**Paul Smith- Strategic lead- looked after children**

**Directorate:**

**People's directorate**

**Tel and email contact:**

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

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Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Place	10.01.2019	16.01.2019
Nicola David		Place	15.01.2019	16.01.2019
Other members				
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Finance: Rachael Sugars		Place	15.01.2019	16.01.2019
Legal: Gurbinder Singh Sangha		Place	18.01.2019	18.01.2019
Director: John Gregg		People	07.01.2019	08.01.2019
Members: Name				
Cllr Seaman	Cabinet Member for Children & Young People		14.01.2019	14.01.2019

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## Public report Cabinet Member

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

4 February 2019

**Name of Cabinet Member:** Councillor Pat Seaman

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Deputy Chief Executive (People)

**Ward(s) affected:** None

**Title:** Coventry Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18

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**Is this a key decision?** No

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### Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet Members of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service between April 2017 and March 2018.

The performance of Coventry Fostering Service is critical to delivery of high quality local placements that can meet the diverse needs of Coventry's looked after children.

The report summarises the activity of the service over the past 12 months. It highlights the challenge of adequately recruiting and retaining the number and type of carers who can meet children's needs. It also emphasises 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 details the ongoing work of the Fostering Transformation Project to increase the percentage of looked after children who are placed within internal fostering provision.

### Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is requested to accept the Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/18.

### Other useful background papers:

None

### Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

Scrutiny Board 2 has recently considered the performance of the fostering service.

### Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

Yes – Corporate Parenting Board

### Will this report go to Council?

No

## **Report title: Coventry Fostering Service 2017/18**

### **1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 This report considers the activity by the Coventry Fostering Service during the year April 2017 to March 2018.
- 1.2 Coventry City Council is committed to making sure that, wherever possible, children are supported to live with their birth parents. Where this has not been possible, and children become looked after, it is preferable that they are placed within a family setting. It is the aim of the Council that, wherever possible, this will be within a foster placement approved and supervised by Coventry Children's Services rather than through commissioning an external placement.
- 1.3 Foster care is subject to legislative and regulatory guidance through, The Children Act 1989, The Fostering Regulations 2011 and the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011. It is further regulated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Regulations 2010. In February 2018, the Department for Education published a national stocktake of fostering in England which is expected to lead to the publication of further regulatory guidance. The regulatory framework for fostering sets out the minimum standards expected to ensure that the care provided by foster carers is adequate to ensure that those children placed within fostering placements are well cared and achieve good outcomes. Through guidance on delegated authority, there is a recognition that foster carers should be empowered to take on the day to day tasks of parenting in the same way as any good parent would
- 1.4 Fostering placements are approved as either mainstream or connected persons. Mainstream refers to a range of households who apply to become foster carers for children not known to them. Mainstream foster carers include those offering both long and short term care and those who provide respite/short breaks care. Mainstream carers can care for between 1 and 3 children at a time and can care for children throughout the age range. Connected persons fostering refers to those households who offer to provide specific care to a child known to them, usually a relative
- 1.5 Prior to the formation of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption Central England (ACE), Coventry's fostering service had been integrated with the work of assessing and supporting adopters. A gradual process of disaggregation of the two services was undertaken between June 2016 and 1 February 2018, when the adoption service was formally transferred to ACE.
- 1.6 In November 2017, the fostering service became part of the newly formed Looked After Service as part of the Children's Services redesign.
- 1.7 The fostering service comprises of four teams and has responsibility for the recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers and the assessment and support of Special Guardians. In addition to the social work teams, there is a Recruitment and Development Officer and a Panel Advisor both of which report to the Operational Lead.
- 1.8 In July 2017, the assessment function of the service was divided into two teams. This allows one team to concentrate on mainstream fostering recruitment and assessment and the other to concentrate on connected persons and Special Guardianship assessment.
- 1.9 In April 2016, the Fostering Transformation Project was launched. The initial aim of the project was to increase the number of looked after children placed in internal mainstream placements from a baseline of 149 to 250 by April 2018. The Transformation Projects were updated in February 2018 and the Fostering Transformation Project now aims to increase

this number to 260 placements by 1/4/19 with further increases in 2019/20 and 2020/21. The aim of the project is both to enable more looked after children to be placed within or close to Coventry and to decrease the reliance on more expensive, externally commissioned, placements.

- 1.10 At the end of March 2017 there were 152 approved mainstream households. In March 2018, this had increased to 170 providing 287 approved placements. Overall 31 new households had been approved but 13 households had been de-registered as a result of resignation.
- 1.11 The number of children placed in internal mainstream placements also rose from 189 (utilising 69% of the approved capacity) to 197 (utilising 68%) of the approved capacity. The target was to have 250 children placed in internal mainstream provision and whilst there was growth towards the target it was not met.
- 1.12 The number of children cared for in a connected persons fostering arrangement rose significantly from 45 on 1 April 2017 to 65 on 31 March 2018. The growth in this area of work is as a result of two main reasons. Courts are now asking that there is a period of testing in fostering arrangements prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order. This results in children remaining looked after for a period of six to twelve months who would have previously exited the care system through Special Guardianship. There has also been an improvement in children's social work practice resulting in a higher number of children being placed within a connected persons arrangement during care proceedings.
- 1.13 At the end of March 2018, there were 651 looked after children.

Of the 651 children 483 children were placed in foster care.

Of the 648 children 260 children were placed with Coventry foster carers compared with 223 at the end of March 2017. This includes 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. This 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. This is a further improvement in this percentage from March 2015 when only 22.8% were placed in internal foster care.
- 1.14 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.

## Recruitment, Approval and Resignations of Mainstream Carers

<b>Mainstream carers</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Approved households	137	153	148	152	170
New carers recruited	18	27	20	25	31 (n.b. 5 households were awaiting ratification of approval)
Carers lost	24	17	20	21	14
Number of available Placements	226	250	242	274	287
Placements utilised		149 (61.6%)	150 (59.3%)	189 (69%)	197 (68.6%)
<b>Recruitment/Assessment Mainstream Carers</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Number of Initial enquires	224	290	312	387	703
Assessments started at stage 1	64	69	112	186	143
Assessments commencing to stage 2	n/a	22	39	66	61
Number of households approved (excluding connected persons)	18	27	20	25	31
Conversion Rate - Enquiry to full assessment	29%	8%	13%	17%	9%
Conversion rate enquiry to Approval	8%	11%	6%	6%	4%

- 1.15 There has been a significant growth in the number of enquiries to become a foster carer received in 2017 -18 (82%). Over the past few years, Coventry Fostering service has established a clear brand and good reputation in the fostering recruitment market which has supported our ability to successfully generate enquiries. More recently, Coventry's fostering service has achieved a significant growth in enquiries through a research driven and innovative approach to marketing focused predominantly on digital marketing. However, making the initial enquiry process less time consuming has meant that those enquiring about fostering are often not as committed to the process as was once the case. This has led to a reduction in both the conversion rate between enquiry and approval and the conversion rate between enquiry and application than that seen in previous years.
- 1.16 There has been a significant increase in the conversion rate from assessment to approval from 38% in 2016 -17 to 51% in 2017-18. The recruitment and assessment process has been reengineered and consequently assessments are progressed more effectively resulting in a significant improvement in the customer experience and hence fewer applicants withdrawing from the process during assessment.



- 1.17 Preparation and training groups have been held for all prospective mainstream foster carers. The training, which is delivered by the fostering team, involves foster carers as well as care leavers. Connected persons foster carers are also invited to attend this training.
- 1.18 One of the main areas of focus for the service has been is to improve the quality of support given to foster carers. This has included ensuring consistency of the supervisory relationship, regular visiting patterns and that annual reviews of the foster carers' placement take place.
- 1.19 Foster carer training is provided through the Council's Organisational Development Team. This includes both mandatory courses ensuring that foster carers have the training necessary to undertake their role, and more in depth training for those carers who want to develop particular specialisms or a deeper knowledge of a subject area, for example attachment or caring for teenagers.
- 1.20 In 2016, a workbook approach to completing the mandatory Training Support and Development Standards (TSD) for newly approved carers was introduced to simplify this process and ensure that all foster carers were able to undertake this piece of work.
- 1.21 From April 2018, foster carers will be able to undertake a wider range of training through joint work with the Adult Education Service. Foster carer feedback has also led to an e-refresher course for mandatory training being introduced rather than foster carers being expected to repeat the full training programme every three years.
- 1.22 The Fostering Recruitment and Development Officer continues to drive Coventry's innovative approach to recruiting foster carers. Coventry has led on two projects across the Midlands to recruit foster carers for local authorities and chairs the West Midlands Fostering Recruitment Forum.
- 1.23 Alongside digital marketing there is on-going activity to strengthen relationships with business partners, faith and community groups to broaden the opportunities to recruit foster carers. This has included both work with a number of churches and other faith groups and attendance at Coventry Pride and Godiva festivals.
- 1.24 Coventry has a strong social media presence established with interactions from media and existing carers. Recruitment activity has included extensive use of social media such Facebook and Twitter. Our online content on the website is regularly updated.
- 1.25 The service produces a monthly Foster Carer Newsletter providing up to date and relevant information. This includes contributions from a range of partners including a regular section produced by the Foster Carers Association.
- 1.26 Coventry continues to have an active and engaged Foster Carer Association. All Coventry approved foster carers are members of the association, although participation is voluntary. The Foster Carer Association meets monthly and invite members of the service to attend meeting to hear foster carer views. The association is consulted on changes to practice and contributes to a range of service activities such as the planning of foster carer training, the welcome event for new foster carers, interviews for new staff members and co facilitating training for foster carers and staff.
- 1.27 The Foster Carer Association supports Coventry's foster carers through provision of buddying support to newly approved foster carers, support groups for foster carers and social events.
- 1.28 The Association has reviewed its membership and officer roles .The Foster Carer Association has re-elected a full management committee and has a clear work plan focusing on:

- Representing foster carers' views
- Raising awareness and celebrating the role of foster carers
- Providing peer support and social opportunities for foster carers and children
- Service improvement.

- 1.24 Events where the service and Council acknowledges the valuable work of our foster carers in meeting the needs of looked after children have been held during 2017/18. These have included a regular welcome event for newly approved foster carers, an annual recognition event and a seasonal celebration. The service also facilitated a foster carer conference in June 2017. The theme of this event was, "providing the best care we can" and included workshops on a number of subjects, the opportunity to ask questions of service management and an opportunity to meet with a range of service who work with foster carers.
- 1.25 The service provides out of hours telephone support for foster carers at all times outside office hours through the fostering service on call rota.
- 1.26 A key priority for the service to achieve the targeted growth in the number of looked after children placed with internal foster carers is to increase occupancy levels, utilising foster carer beds. The average number of children placed in internal mainstream fostering provision rose from 178 for April 2017 to 200 for March 2018. This was below the target set as part of the medium term financial strategy and despite the growth of the number of approved placements occupancy remained static. The fostering Transformation Project has a growth in occupancy as one of its key objectives and a number of tasks are underway to address this including one to one meetings with supervising social workers, a gap analysis of the demand for placements with the supply of foster carers and work to develop the range of placements that Coventry foster carers are supported and developed to provide. The Transformation Board is also undertaking work on re-engineering the placement process to enable more effective matching of placements with internal foster carers. In December 2017, members of staff from the fostering service took on the role of placement searches for internal placements which had previously been undertaken by the Placements Team to support this work
- 1.27 In 2017 -18 13 Fostering Households ceased to foster. 5 of these were connected persons, All carers are offered and exit interview with a manager in the service and their feedback has been used to improve service outcomes.

<b>Reason</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Permanence plan for child	5	1	2		1
Move to another agency as moved 30 miles away from Coventry			1	19	1
Personal circumstances e.g. separation, bereavement, retirement	10	9	12		11
Dissatisfied with quality of service			1		
Safeguarding (Termination)	2	2			
Resigned prior to quality of care and safeguarding issues	1	1	4	1	
Other – including death		2		1	

<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>
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- 1.28 There has been an improvement in foster carer retention during the past year with no carers citing dissatisfaction with the service as the reason for their resignation. No foster carers have moved to another agency other than one household who moved a significant distance away from the city.
- 1.29 Of those foster carers approved by Coventry 8 households transferred from fostering from an independent fostering agency. This represents 26% of total mainstream fostering approvals.
- 1.30 In 2016, the Coventry fostering service introduced a Foster Carer Support Strategy to improve standards for the support of foster carers. This was initially due to run to March 2018 and will be refreshed and updated by June 2018. The refresh of this document will be promoted throughout Children's Services through a programme of internal communications including workshops with children's social work teams co-facilitated by foster carers.
- 1.35 The KEEP programme intervention has continued to be offered to both foster carers and Special Guardians. This is a 16 week intensive training programme based on social learning theory intended to support foster carers and Special Guardians to manage behaviour and sustain placements. It is specifically targeted at those who care for children aged between 4 and 11. In 2017/18 12 foster carers and 6 Special Guardians completed the course. The programme is evidence based and research undertaken with participants continues to show its effectiveness in enhancing placement stability. The programme was nominated for a Phoenix Award this year.
- 1.34 Elaine Price became the chair of Coventry's Fostering Panel in August 2016. In 2017 -18, Fostering Panel met on 38 occasions and was quorate on each occasion. This has represented a significant growth in the work of the Panel. The growth in Fostering Panel work is as a result of both the increased number of mainstream approvals and the growth of connected persons fostering. There has been significant input into Panel membership to broaden the range of those sitting. There has also been work undertaken with Panel members to ensure that they make evidence based, analytical decisions and provide a welcoming experience to those attending. The Panel makes recommendations to the fostering service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision as to whether a foster carer should be approved.
- 1.35 There has been significant input into Panel membership to broaden the range of those sitting. There has also been work undertaken with Panel members to ensure that they make evidence based decisions and provide a welcoming experience to those attending.
- 1.39 The Panel has continued to provide the service detailed feedback on the quality of the work discussed and has noted continued improvements in the assessments and foster carer reviews. Feedback to the panel from those attending has demonstrated a significant improvement in the experience of applicants whose case is being presented.
- 1.40 In September 2016, Coventry City Council embarked on a joint project with an independent fostering agency to recruit, assess and support eight specialist fostering households who would provide solo placements to young people who might otherwise live in a children's home. This project had some success as one household approved by the independent agency joined it and one other household was recruited as part of it. However, the project did not meet the targets set and was, therefore, terminated by mutual agreement in October 2017. The household recruited was subsequently approved by Coventry City Council and took a first placement in December 2017. In addition to this, the foster carers approved through Coventry City Council's specialist fostering scheme which was wound down in 2014 have been approached to join a new specialist scheme and to date one has taken a placement as part of this scheme. The fostering service has recruited a staff member to lead

on a new specialist fostering scheme. Marketing to recruit foster carers to this scheme (titled Next Steps) started in May 2018.

1.42 The priorities for service going forward are:

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.

## **2 Options considered and recommended proposal**

That the Fostering Report is noted.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

3.1 Not applicable

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

4.1 Not applicable

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services**

5.1 Financial implications

5.1.1 In-house fostering fees – Outturn 2017/18

	<b>2016/17 £000</b>	<b>2017/18 £000</b>
<b>Budget</b>	5,115	6,044
<b>Expenditure</b>	4,261	4,570

Budget and expenditure are increasing as part of the fostering Transformation Plan, as discussed in 1.10. This enables savings in other areas, specifically the external placements budget, which are significantly in excess of the additional spend on in-house fostering.

Fostering fees for 2018/19 were increased by 2% from 2017/18 levels in order to recognise the impact of inflation and to ensure that our rates remain competitive with those of surrounding local authorities.

## 5.2 Legal implications

5.1 The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 state that the fostering service provider must compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service (“the statement of purpose”) which consists of—

- (a) a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and
- (b) a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service.

5.2 The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector, place a copy on their website (if they have one), and make copies available, upon request, to—

- (a) any person working for the purposes of the fostering service,
- (b) any foster parent or prospective foster parent of the fostering service,
- (c) any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service, and
- (d) the parent of any such child.

5.3 Under Statutory Guidance the fostering service must compile a Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services, and facilities which are provided (including the provision of any “parent and child arrangements”). The statement must be reviewed and updated as necessary, but at least annually and published on the provider’s website (if they have one), with a copy provided to Ofsted.

## 6. Other implications

### 6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

The fostering service contributes to the wellbeing of children through arranging a fostering placement for a child whose own family is unable to provide care. It supports a key element of Corporate Parenting – that of securing appropriate family placements for looked after children’, as an effective means of giving them the best life chances possible.

### 6.2 How is risk being managed?

This risk is being managed through the Fostering Transformation Project which reports to the Transformation Board and Children’s Services Leadership Team. Both groups provide robust challenge to the delivery against the targets set for the service, in examining the increase in foster carer households and occupancy of approved beds. In addition, the service also reports to the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) when requested.

### 6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Increasing the numbers of internal foster carers and children placed internally will reduce the need for more costly external placements and enable looked after children to be placed closer to their home. This will mean better outcomes for looked after children in Coventry.

### 6.4 Equalities / EIA

An Equality Impact Needs Assessment was undertaken as part of the Fundamental Service Review in 2012.

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment**

*None*

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

*None*

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