
Cabinet Member Children and Young People

7 April 2015

Name of Cabinet Member:

Children and Young People, Councillor Ed Ruane

**Director Approving Submission of the report:
Executive Director People**

**Ward(s) affected:
All**

Title:

Recommendations from the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Task and Finish Group on Fostering

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Following a decision at their meeting on 22 October 2014, the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board agreed to establish a task and finish group to look in more detail at the "offer" made to foster carers to support the on-going recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers.

It was recognised by the Board that not only was the recruitment of more in-house foster carers important, there was a need to improve the financial and support "offer" in order to retain existing foster carers.

The task and finish group considered the following areas:

- Local Context and Background
- Feedback from Foster Carers
- Marketing and Recruitment Strategy
- Improving the "Offer" to Foster Carers – Skills Fee Per Child
- Council Tax rebate/reduction
- Non-financial support offer including professional development
- Foster Friendly Employer Policy

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member Children and Young People is recommended to accept the following recommendations from the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board.

- 1) That the proposed fee structure for a skills fee per child is implemented following consideration of feedback from foster carers. *(This has already been agreed further to the Cabinet Member Children and Young People minute 27/14)*

- 2) Review the end of year statement and advice provided to foster carers for fostering income and tax implications, to ensure foster carers can easily extract the relevant information for their annual tax returns.
- 3) That additional research and monitoring is done on:
 - a. the affect that any potential drop in income has on the number of staying put places offered to young people over 18,
 - b. the number of young people who would like to stay put and aren't able to as their carers don't offer staying put places,
 - c. the statutory requirements and associated funding implications of staying put places.
- 4) That a council tax rebate for Foster Carers in Coventry is not considered at this time.
- 5) That the Council pursue becoming a Fostering Friendly Employer, ensuring that this is additional to any other family friendly policy the Council may have.
- 6) That crèche availability whilst training for Foster Carers should be investigated. Existing childcare provision should be the preferred option and 2 year old entitlement should also be considered.
- 7) To support the Foster Care Support Offer focused on a "team around the child" approach.
- 8) To strengthen the team around the child ethos and ensure everybody understands the value and responsibilities of each other's roles.
- 9) To explore opportunities to influence national social work training programmes to support this culture shift.
- 10) That the "team around the child" approach is used to appraise social workers.
- 11) That the Education and Children's Service Scrutiny Board consider the policy statement on delegations before it goes to the Cabinet Member, at their first meeting of the Municipal Year 2015/16.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1 – Report from the Task and Finish Group on Fostering

Other useful background papers:

Cabinet Member report 3 March 2015

[Annual Statement of Payments to Coventry City Council Foster Carers](#)

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

The recommendations and report from the task and finish group have been considered by the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board at their meeting on 26 March 2015

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

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Recommendations from the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) Task and Finish Group on Fostering

1 Context (or background)

- 1.1 Following a decision at their meeting on 22 October 2014, the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board agreed to establish a task and finish group to look in more detail at the “offer” made to foster carers to support the on-going recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers.
- 1.2 It was recognised by the Board that not only was the recruitment of more in-house foster carers important, there was a need to improve the financial and support offer to support the retention of existing foster carers.
- 1.3 At their meeting on the 22 October, the Board received an update from Officers, including at the end of September 2014 there were 617 looked after children (LAC).
- 428 were in foster care – representing 69% - (excludes 35 children with Connected Persons).
 - 150 of these children were placed with an in-house foster carer. This represents 24% of the LAC population.
 - As of 20 October 2014 there were 150 fostering households. They had a total 194 placements available. Some households were approved for a second place but only if it is a sibling group. There was an additional 62 second place sibling group placements.
 - When calculating vacancies these extra places should not be counted as they can only be filled in certain circumstances. 18 children that are in placement are in these second place sibling group placements, so for the purpose of calculating a vacancy rate these are excluded from the 150 children in placement.
 - There are therefore 62 placement vacancies. These include carers who are on hold; second (non-sibling) placements that cannot be used as a result of the needs of the child in placement; and staying put children (i.e. those over the age of 18).
- 1.4 A detailed benchmarking exercise with a number of Local Authorities (LA’s) to look at LAC placements has been undertaken. The table below details the analysis of this information as at March 2014.

Local Authority[^]	LAC per 10,000 (March 14)	% of LAC Fostering Placements	% of LAC Internal Fostering (includes connected persons)	% of LAC External Fostering
Coventry	87	70.8%	30.5%	40.3%
Nottingham	92	71.4%	34.1%	37.2%
Peterborough*	80	86.2%	52.2%	34.0%
Staffordshire	56	74.9%	48.6%	26.3%
Nottinghamshire	51	75.9%	46.1%	29.8%
Derby*	77	74.2%	40.4%	33.7%
Stoke	98	55.8%	35.2%	20.6%
Leicestershire	34	83.3%	60.7%	23.0%
Warwickshire+	62	71.2%	53.3%	17.8%

[^] Information has been provided by each Local Authority, so we are unable to verify the accuracy

* Statistical neighbours with Coventry

+ Warwickshire information is as at January 2014

- 1.5 This comparison shows that Coventry has low provision of internal foster care and high provision of external foster care compared to other LA's – particularly statistical neighbours. In addition, it demonstrates that Coventry has a higher usage of external residential placements.
- 1.6 For the financial year 2013/14 it was calculated that internal foster placements had a unit cost of £19,000 compared to an external placement cost of £40,000.
- 1.7 Therefore, Coventry's reliance on external placements (40.3% of LAC in external placements) puts the authority under financial pressure, not only to reduce the total number of looked after children, but also the number of those placed externally.

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 Members of the task and finish group considered current performance reports as well as current proposals to improve the offer to Foster Carers.
- 2.2 Members also welcomed the contributions from representatives of the Coventry Fostering Network, who were able to present information from a foster carer perspective.
- 2.3 The task and finish group considered the following areas:
 - Local Context and Background
 - Feedback from Foster Carers
 - Marketing and Recruitment Strategy
 - Improving the "Offer" to Foster Carers – Skills Fee Per Child
 - Staying put placements for looked after children over 18.
 - Council Tax rebate/reduction
 - Non-financial support offer including professional development
 - Foster Friendly Employer Policy
- 2.4 More details on the information and discussions that took place at the task and finish group meetings can be found in Appendix 1.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Representatives from the Coventry Foster Carers Network were part of the task and finish group, as well as there being on-going consultation with foster carers on specific aspects of the work, such as the skills fee per child and the Foster Care Support Offer.
- 3.2 Foster Carers and Looked After Children will also be represented on the Fostering Operational Group in future so will be able to input into any further discussions on improvements to services.
- 3.3 Where appropriate, detailed consultation with foster carers will take place in relation to the different elements of the recommendations.

4 Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board request an update on progress of implementation of these recommendations in October 2015, 6 months of them being accepted by the Cabinet Member.

5 Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications

The financial implications of moving to a fee per child were set out in the Cabinet Member Report that went to Cllr Ruane at his meeting on the 3rd March 2015. This report can be accessed via the following link:

<http://democraticservices.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s22316/04%20-%20Annual%20Statement%20of%20Payments%20to%20Coventry%20City%20Council%20Foster%20Carers.pdf>

We are currently in the process of re-launching the policy and payment structure for 'Staying Put' in line with national guidance and statutory requirements. This will be taken to a Cabinet Member meeting in the new municipal year.

Any other financial implications as a result of the recommendations in this report will be delivered within the existing financial resource of the Fostering Service.

5.2 Legal implications

No legal implications

5.3 HR implications

Should the Council become a Fostering Friendly Employer, the development of options for changes to the HR Policy will be required so that employees, should they become foster carers, are appropriately supported by the organisation. Any policy would take account of current employment legislation, existing terms and conditions, family friendly policies and Trades Union consultation.

6 Other implications

None

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)?

Locally Committed – Improving the quality of life for Coventry people...especially for our most vulnerable residents by protecting and supporting our most vulnerable people through keeping children and adults safe from harm.

Delivering our priorities - Maximising the use of our assets; reducing operating costs.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

By implementing these recommendations, the financial risk to the organisation is reduced by increasing the supply of internal foster placements and reducing spend on more expensive independent fostering agencies.

By implementing these recommendations, the reputational risk to the organisation is reduced by improved relationships between the local authority and foster carers.

By implementing these recommendations, the risk of harm to vulnerable children is reduced by more stable and improved placements for looked after children.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The implementation of these recommendations should result in the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers for the placement of looked after children. This, in turn, should reduce spend on more expensive independent fostering agencies.

By recognising the professional status of foster carers in Coventry and becoming a Foster Friendly Employer, the organisation's reputation will improve and raise our profile locally, regionally and nationally.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There should be no equality impact from the implementation of these recommendations. Services to looked after children will be improved by better and more stable foster placements.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

There should be improved relationships between the local authority and the Coventry Foster Carers Network.

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