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**Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)**

10 December 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:**

1. Progress of recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Fostering
2. Annual Fostering Report 2014/15

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

This reports sets out the

1. Progress made against the recommendations of the task and finish group which concluded in March 2015. The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board, reported these recommendations to the Cabinet Member Children and Young People in April 2015.
2. The annual report of the fostering service 2014/15 updated at Quarter 2 in 2015/16.

**1 Recommendations**

- 1.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board are recommended to:
  - 1) Note complete actions against recommendations made
  - 2) Support the work being made to complete recommendations still outstanding
  - 3) Identify any further recommendations to the Cabinet Member
  - 4) Identify any further reporting requirements

**2 Progress against the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group**

- 1) The proposed fee structure for a skills fee per child is implemented following consideration of feedback from foster carers.

**Progress: Completed.** Coventry introduced a skills fee per child and allowances in line with those recommended by the National Fostering Network. The Cabinet Member agreed to the proposed changes in March 2015 and these have been implemented from April 1 2015.
- 2) Additional research and monitoring is done on Staying Put
  - a. the affect that any potential drop in income has on the number of staying put places offered to young people

- b. the number of young people who would like to stay put and aren't able to as their carers don't offer,
- c. the statutory requirements and associated funding implications

**Progress: In progress.** The staying put policy has been revised to fully consider the recommendations of the task and finish group. The report and the policy will be presented to the Cabinet Member for Children on 8 December 2015

- 3) A council tax rebate for Foster Carers in Coventry was not considered, instead, the Council decided to implement the skills fee on a per child basis, as this was felt to be more equitable allowance.
- 4) The Council pursue becoming a Fostering Friendly Employer, ensuring that this is additional to any other family friendly policy the Council may have.

**Progress: Completed.** The policy was approved in July 2015 by Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources and launched across the Council in September 2015.

- 5) 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.

**Progress: Completed.** Child care support for carers whilst on training has been agreed with Workforce Development. These arrangements remain under scrutiny by the service.

- 6) The Foster Care Support Offer focus on a "team around the child" approach. The main objective of this is to strengthen the team around the child ethos and ensure everybody understands the value and responsibilities of each other's roles.

**Progress: In Progress.** The team around the child approach has at its core the need to enable our staff recognise that our foster carers are most **valued and respected** people for children in care. Engaging foster carers effectively and respectfully as core members of the "team around the child" was launched at the Fostering Conference in March 2015. There have been a range of events since June 2015 to engage social workers across the service as well as Practice Lite Bites event delivered in partnership with Coventry Foster Care Association and the Family Placement service. In addition, further events have been scheduled in 2016 across all social work teams and the approach will be embedded in the workforce development in 2016/17.

- 7) Explore opportunities to influence national social work training programmes to support this culture shift.

**Progress: in Progress.** There has been limited progress on this recommendation and further consideration is underway with the Principle Social Worker.

- 8) The "team around the child" approach is used to appraise social workers.

**Progress: In progress.** The new Behaviours Framework enables staff development and performance to be considered under the "Working together" and "Delivering good customer service" behaviours. The requirement to demonstrate working effectively with foster carers has been included in the appraisal framework for social workers and their line managers.

- 9) 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.

**Progress: Completed.** Delegation of Authority Policy for Looked After Children was approved on 30 June 2016 by Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. This has been launched and implemented across children's services with ongoing briefing workshops arranged into 2016.

### 3 Annual Fostering Report 2014/15

- 2.1 The annual fostering report was presented to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on 27 July 2015 and was initially scheduled for consideration by this Scrutiny Board in September 2015. As the report was rescheduled to December 2015, this report updates the performance data as at Quarter 2.
- 2.2 The annual report summarises the activity of the service from April 2014 to March 2015. It highlights the challenge of sufficiently recruiting the number and type of carers who can meet children's needs and the critical requirements of on-going support and supervision to foster carers who are our most respected and valued resource. 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.
- 2.3 The service's improvement plan is primarily focused on improving the quality of the service received by carers, increasing the number and occupancy of Coventry Foster Carers whilst decreasing reliance on more expensive Independent Fostering Agencies. This is monitored and has robust challenge from the Fostering Steering Group which meets bi-monthly.
- 2.4 At the end of March 2015 there were 147 approved households and by the end of October there were 151 approved households. The target for 2015/16 was to be at 175 households, (180 internal foster care places filled). Since April 2015 a further 10 additional fostering households have been approved. There are a further 14 fostering assessments underway with further recruitment activity planned in January 2016. A service review will be undertaken in December 2015 to consider what further actions can be taken to secure a net increase of 15 households by March 2016. This is still under the original target of 175 set out.
- 2.5 2015/16 budget setting included a savings target of £400,000, linked to the increase in internal foster carers and reduction in external foster carers. The assumptions built into this were that there would be 163 internal foster care places filled by the end of March 2015 rising to 180 by the end of March 2016. This is currently creating an overspend, included as part of the forecast position for 2015/16.
- 2.6 Since April 2015, 14 carers have exited the service and for 8 carers (65%) changes in their personal circumstances has been the main reason. 10 of the 14 carers have been on hold for considerable time and as a result have not had an impact on the number of placements available.

Permanence plan for child	1
Dissatisfied with service	1
Personal circumstances e.g. separation, bereavement, retirement and moved more than 30 miles outside the City.	8
Resigned prior to Safeguarding issues	2
Deregistration	1
Safeguarding (Termination)	0
Move to another agency (adopted 2 Coventry children and moved more than 30 miles out of the City )	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>

- 2.7 Increasing the occupancy of children placed internally is a crucial area of improvement. At Quarter 2 there were 613 children looked after. Of these 449 children were placed in foster carer.

Of the 449 children in foster care at the end of Quarter 2:

- 268 children (59.6%) were placed with the independent fostering agencies.

- 151 children were placed with internal foster carers, compared with 134 at the end of March 2015. At the end of October this reduced to 149, however at the end of November 2015 this increased to 153 children.
  - A further 30 children were placed with foster carers from the family or friendship network of the child.
- 2.8 Of the households providing mainstream foster care the number of placements available has increased at Quarter 2 was 258 placements compared with 236 placements at the end of March 2015 (i.e. 1.6 placements per household). This placements are reduced by the number of fostering households on hold and the number of beds blocked (64) with actual places vacant at 42. Further work is underway to reduce the vacancy level to increase occupancy rates and improve performance against the 180 target set out in paragraph 2.5.
- 2.9 The appointment of Director of Children’s Service has already provided further challenge and renewed focus to accelerate the recruitment and improve the retention of foster carers.
- 2.10 All recruitment activities in relation to prospective carers (including initial visits and assessments) were tracked on a weekly basis to ensure that carers were assessed rapidly and to prevent drift. Similar scrutiny was applied to the annual review process for Foster Carers and the management of any allegations against them.
- 2.11 The Recruitment and Development officer has sharply focused the recruitment campaigns. Coventry now has a strong marketing strategy and brand which includes both fostering and adoption. It utilises current research undertaken by Fostering Network and the Department of Education to incorporate value modes with in the key messages inherent to the campaigns - “Childhood Memories” and “Alfie’s journey”. There is on-going activity to strengthen relationships with business partners, faith and community groups. This includes
- Coventry Sports Foundation
  - Coventry Railway Station and Virgin Trains
  - The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - Positive Images Festival
  - Free Radio and Hillz FM.
  - Imagination Café
  - Faith and Community groups
  - Warwick University
  - Coventry University
- 2.12 Coventry now 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 and feedback about the website has significantly improved. The launch of the ‘Alfie’s Journey’ film has further increased the reach and awareness in the City and has won an International Film Award.

Activity and impact can be measured by the following.

- 76K impressions on Twitter
- 44K circa views of ‘Alfie’s Journey’ over different online platforms
- 1822 Likes on our Facebook Page (from 1054 in April 2015)
- 257 Followers on Twitter
- 20 information sessions will be held by end of March 2016.

- 4 Interviews on Hillz FM
- 3 festivals attended (Godiva, Positive Images, Hillfields)
- 3 Interviews on BBC CWR (two with foster carers)
- 2 Free Radio Storycorners held
- 3 articles in Citivision
- 3 children's storytime event targeting BME communities by end March 2016
- One exhibition online and at Herbert Art Gallery in June 2015
- Warwick Arts Centre showing 'Alfie's journey' on big screens
- Christmas Light Switch showed 'Alfie's Journey'

2.13 The Recruitment and Development Officer supports developments in the Service with regard to an effective communication and retention strategy, providing strong challenge. This includes;

- Monthly Foster Carers Newsletter established providing up to date and relevant information.
- Dedicated page for the FCA included in the newsletter each month
- A closed group Facebook page set up Coventry Foster Carers' Association set up and now fully operational
- Facilitated capacity building with the Coventry Foster Carers Association
- Online Survey for the FCA foster carers needs from a foster carers organisation
- Led on the consultation for the fees and allowances
- Organised a tax and benefits session for carers and produced a guide for all carers
- Supporting foster carers to set up a weekly foster carers meet up (now running)
- Engaged foster carers in recruitment (advertorials on Free Radio, interviews, website and social media content and attendance at information events)
- Developing an evidenced based approach to advice and support for fostering families in regard to the impact of fostering on sons and daughters of foster carers

2.14 The Coventry Foster Care Association has reviewed its membership and officer roles .The Foster Carers' Association have re-elected a full management committee and have clear work plan focusing on:

- Representing foster carers' views
- Raise awareness and celebrate the role of foster carers
- Provide peer support and social opportunities for foster carers and children

2.15 In addition the FCA and the Service and have agreed to focus on the following areas for the next quarter. Progress is reviewed at monthly meeting held with between the FCA and managers from the Service. The FCA is also represented on the Fostering Steering Group.

- Timeliness of payments  
Process reviewed, evidence that this is improving. Monitored by the Service Manager
- Escalation process  
Process reviewed and agreed with social care managers and FCA in July 2015. This has been communicated via newsletter and FCA in August 2015. Monitored via monthly meetings
- Foster carers' Handbook and this is now updated
- Discretionary payments  
This is an ongoing work stream and work in progress

- Savings and ISAs (through the Share Foundation)  
Further guidance to be developed by end of January 2015.

**List of Appendices included:**

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

Appendix 2 – The Annual Fostering Report

**Other useful background papers:**

**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**