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

**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018**

**Subject: Progress Towards an Outstanding Fostering Service**

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**1 Purpose of the Note**

- 1.1 To note the progress made towards establishing an outstanding fostering service and the subsequent benefits for Coventry's looked after children.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) Note the progress made since the 2015 task and finish recommendations were agreed
  - 2) Identify any further recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

**3 Information/Background**

- 3.1 A report was presented to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) in March 2015 following a Task and Finish review of Coventry's fostering service. Ten specific recommendations were made. (Appendix 1) Since this time, there has been a significant change in the management of the fostering service. A new service manager was appointed on 6 August 2016 and subsequently confirmed in the Operational Lead post following the service redesign. A new Strategic Lead for looked after children has been in post since 9 January 2017 with responsibility for the fostering service. This has brought fresh innovation to the fostering service in the city.
- 3.2 The recommendations from the 2015 report have all been completed and appear in Appendix 1. The implementation of the recommendations has contributed to the significant improvement in Coventry's fostering service in the last 2 years.
- 3.3 Other areas of improvement are:
- Recruitment of foster carers: - this is an area where Coventry is performing very well. The Recruitment and Development Officer has been able to generate significant interest to foster for Coventry. There were 703 enquiries made about fostering in 2017 -18 The Recruitment and Development Officer currently chairs the West Midlands Regional Recruitment Forum and has co-ordinated the work with other local authorities to produce three films that can be used to promote foster carer recruitment: Alfie's Journey (2016), Giants (2017) and There was a boy (2018). Alfie's Journey won the Convert Cover Up Film Award for 2015. There have been 36 approvals of foster carer households. This has boosted the number of internal foster placements that can be offered to the children of Coventry.
  - Current mainstream placements: - Coventry has seen an increase in the number of mainstream fostering placements. This is against a backdrop of a national and regional

picture where the recruitment of foster carers has been difficult. From 2016 to 2017, there has been a 1% increase in the number of mainstream foster care placements and an 11% increase in connected persons foster placements nationally. However, Coventry has seen a much bigger rise in approvals for both mainstream and connected persons' placements:

- 2016 -17 mainstream rise of 35 occupied placements = 23% (149 to 184).
- 2017 – 18 mainstream rise of 20 occupied placements = 11% (184 to 204)
- Occupancy rates continue to improve. In 2015 there was an occupancy rate of 65%. This has now improved and stands at 74%. This has contributed to the growth in internal fostering placements and means more children will be living with Coventry foster carers.
- Finally, the proportion of children in internal fostering placements has increased and now stands at 33.5%. This is an increase from 30.5% in 2015 and demonstrates the improvement in the fostering service.
- Specialist services: - a number of specialist initiatives are now in place.
  - An Emergency Foster Carer scheme has been developed and is in the process of being implemented. This will mean that there will be a rota of foster carers on call who can take children in an emergency. This means they will not have to be placed in external placements.
  - A specialist scheme has also been developed. This is called Next Steps. This follows a pilot scheme undertaken in conjunction with an Independent Fostering Agency. This scheme did not deliver the required impact so it is now being provided in-house. There is a target for 8 carers in the next 12 months and there are already 2 carers identified. A senior practitioner starts with Coventry on 1 July 2018 and his role is to progress the scheme. This will divert some children from being placed in children's homes and maintain them in a family based placement.
  - Parent and child fosters carers - Coventry has been successful in recruiting 2 carers from IFAs who provide parent and child placements. It is intended that these carers are used as the basis of developing a scheme of our own in the near future.
  - Short breaks - the fostering service is keen to develop this service for children who have a disability. This will be considered in the next 12 months
- Support for foster carers: - support to foster carers continues to improve. The training offer has expanded this year and includes training 'out of hours' to make sure there are as many opportunities for carers to attend as possible. There are 5 carer support groups which includes one specifically for family and friends carers. This is extended to carers who have a Special Guardianship Order for children. Coventry continues to offer the KEEP programme to help maintain placement stability and this programme was nominated for a Phoenix Award this year. There is on-going liaison with the Coventry Foster Carer Association (FCA) and Coventry is supporting the buddy scheme that it operates.

- Connected person's placements: - these are placements that are made and supported when children who are looked after live with family members or friends. Carers have to meet fostering regulations and National Minimum Standards but the placements are often more complex as a result of the previous established relationship with the child. There has been significant change in this area of work and an increase in the number of placements to 73. This has been as a result of improved social worker practice and changes in case law through the courts. Carers are entitled to the same level of support as mainstream carers. As a result of the increased demand, and the often tight assessment timescales imposed by the court, a specialist assessment team has been established in the fostering service.
  - 2016 -17 connected person rise of 26 placements = 118% (22 to 48)
  - 2017 – 18 connected person rise of 20 placements = 42% (48 to 68)
- Staying Put: - this is an option that allows young people to 'stay put' with their foster carer after they have left care at 18 years of age. They can stay with carers until they are 21 years of age, provided that this is what the young person and the foster carers want. There is a grant from the Government for this. Staying Put is discussed and promoted with all young people. This works well and there are currently 35 young people in Staying Put arrangements.

#### **4 Summary**

- 4.1 There have been some significant improvements in the fostering service since 2015. These have been driven through by a highly competent Operational Lead with the support of colleagues across Children's Services, the Council as a whole, and partner agencies. There is evidence that this is improving outcomes for children and it is anticipated that this will continue in the future.

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## Appendix 1

Recommendations from the report of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) March 2015:

- 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).*  
This was introduced in 2015/16 and remains in place. The payments progression scheme was reviewed in 2016 and payments to connected persons foster carers were reviewed in 2017.
- 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.**  
This is now provided to foster carers on an annual basis.
- 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,**  
This is informally reviewed and there is no evidence that this is generally an issue that needs to be tackled.
  - 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,**  
There is no evidence that young people are not able to access Staying Put arrangements because the foster carers do not offer this.
  - c. **the statutory requirements and associated funding implications of Staying Put places.**  
There is a constant focus on changes in statutory requirements. There has been no change in the requirements since 2015.
- 4) **That a council tax rebate for Foster Carers in Coventry is not considered at this time.**  
This issue was addressed through the revised fee structure.
- 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.**  
This was implemented in September 2015. The following link gives more detail about the initiative.  
[https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/\\_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc={1fd322aa-9678-4efb-afc6-d44c46e4c074}&action=default](https://coventrycc.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc={1fd322aa-9678-4efb-afc6-d44c46e4c074}&action=default)
- 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.**  
The service researched the options for providing crèche facilities at training sessions. It is not possible to do this due to Ofsted regulations. A crèche is offered at the foster carer conference, and foster carers are supported to access support both from those in their network and other foster carers to enable them to attend training.
- 7) **To support the Foster Care Support Offer focussed on a "team around the child" approach.**

The foster carer support strategy was developed and rolled out from 2016 to 2018 incorporating this approach. The support strategy is currently under review and due to be relaunched at the foster carer conference. The team around the child approach has assisted better working relationships between foster carers and children's social workers but the structure and processes need to be more flexible and suited to a child's individual needs.

- 8) **To strengthen the team around the child ethos and ensure everybody understands the value and responsibilities of each other's roles.**

Please see recommendation 7.

- 9) **To explore opportunities to influence national social work training programmes to support this culture shift.**

Coventry has focused on improving the fostering service. Now that it is a better performing service, it has begun to get involved in leading practice both in the West Midlands and nationally.

- 10) **That the "team around the child" approach is used to appraise social workers.**

Appraisals for social workers have been updated in 2018 to reflect changes in the registration process for social workers.

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