

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

Is this a key decision? No

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

Mainstream carers	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
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%)
Recruitment/Assessment Mainstream Carers	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
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.

Reason	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
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	

Total	18	15	20	21	13
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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

	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000
Budget	5,115	6,044
Expenditure	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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