

Corporate Parenting Panel

29 March 2019

Foster Carer Recruitment and Marketing Activity



Report of Glenda Henderson, Placement Efficiency Manager, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report seeks to provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of marketing activity to support the recruitment of foster carers and also highlights the many challenges facing the service.

Executive summary

- 2 The need for effective marketing and the recruitment and approval of foster carers continues to be a key strategic priority for Children's Services in line with the Sufficiency Duty and the increased demand, given the rising number of looked after children.
- 3 As the number of children coming into care continues to rise, both nationally and at a local level, competition from both regional local authorities and independent agencies presents a significant challenge in recruiting foster carers.
- 4 As at end of February 2019, there were a total number of 250 foster carer households providing short term, permanent and respite fostering placements to 391 children/young people. A further 115 foster placements are provided by Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 5 The proposed marketing plan includes targeted campaigns to recruit foster carers for teenagers, sibling groups and to provide placements for children with a plan of permanence, where there is currently a gap in foster carer provision. Whilst a marketing presence will continue throughout the year, a strong focus will be placed on marketing activity during the three main recruitment periods in May (Fostering Fortnight), September and January.

Recommendation(s)

- 6 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to note the contents of the report and to engage with further discussion at the forthcoming meeting.

Background

- 7 Over the last five years alone, the number of looked after children nationally and in County Durham has risen. Nationally, there were 75,420 looked after children in England, as at 31 March 2018, compared to 68,110 as at 31 March 2013 – a 10.7% increase. In County Durham, the figures for the same period rose from 625 to 800 - a 28% increase.
- 8 The council is operating in a highly competitive market within a relatively small geographic area. As well as all of the 12 local authorities who are recruiting foster carers, a number of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) operate across the region, some local and some national, but all competing for the same potential carers.
- 9 Changes in society are having a big impact on the recruitment of foster carers. These changes include families having children later, children remaining in the family home for longer, a burden of care for elderly relatives and also the current costs of housing and having a spare bedroom. All factors which add to the challenge of recruiting foster carers which underpins the local authority's Sufficiency Duty to provide sufficient accommodation within their area which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after.
- 10 At present 250 foster carer households provide 391 in-house foster carer placements and Independent Fostering Agencies provide a further 115 fostering placements. Fostering placements provide short-term, permanence and respite provision.

Marketing Activity

- 11 The recruitment of foster carers is influenced by a number of factors, not just on effective marketing and communication. It can be influenced by the customer journey / experience post initial enquiry and retention of existing carers as well as individual circumstances of the foster carers themselves. Work is on-going to improve current recruitment systems and processes, with a significant focus on the customer journey from the initial enquiry stage to approval stage.
- 12 There are three main recruitment periods throughout the year when many fostering agencies, including our own, choose to focus their main recruitment activity. These are January, coinciding with New Year's resolutions, May, during the national campaign of Foster Care Fortnight

and September, the 'empty nester' campaign, time marked by the start of a new academic term which heralds changes in family life and family composition. Targeted recruitment campaigns are featured throughout these campaigns to recruit foster carers for teenagers and sibling groups where there is currently a gap in provision. During these periods a marketing presence is augmented to ensure the fostering service remain competitive in a saturated market.

- 13 Marketing activity is planned to reflect both the above periods and campaigns throughout the year, providing a range of marketing methods and platforms. These include the use of bus stops/bus rears, digital screens, banners, radio, press including Durham County News and methods of social media with a continued Facebook presence.
- 14 A Foster Carer Recruitment Focus Group has recently been established and this has already provided valuable feedback and a range of innovative marketing suggestions and opportunities which may form part of future marketing plans and campaigns.

Conclusion

- 15 Foster Carer recruitment continues to be a key strategic priority for Children's Services in line with the Sufficiency Duty and the increased demand, given the rising number of looked after children. This report highlights the challenges facing the service and also recognises the need to provide a planned and innovative method of marketing which increases the number of foster carer enquiries which leads to meeting the foster carer recruitment target.

Background papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Section 22G Children Act 1989 requires Local Authority`s to take steps to secure so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within their area which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare to be provided with accommodation that is in their local area. (“sufficiency duty”)

Finance – There is continuing pressure on the LAC budget.

Consultation - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None

Human Rights – Children/young people have the right to a family life where they are cared for in a safe and secure environment.

Crime and Disorder - None

Staffing - None

Accommodation – Children and young people who are looked after by the Authority require accommodation within suitable and regulated placement provision.

Risk – Not being able to recruit foster carers to provide sufficient foster carer placements.

Procurement - None