

Corporate Parenting Panel

30 September 2022

Annual Report of Durham County Council's Fostering Service



Report of Jodie Henderson, Practice Lead Children in Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report outlines the work of the Fostering Service during the period 2021-22 and the activity of the Fostering Panels.
- 2 The Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2021-22 is attached as Appendix 2 of the report.

Executive summary

- 2 This report seeks to provide an overview of the achievements and challenges of the fostering service in the context of an increase in the population of our Children Looked After and alongside national fostering trends.
- 3 The report provides a summary of the placement of children showing the usage of inhouse foster carers and increasing numbers of family and friends' carers, as well as the use of independent fostering agency and children's home placements.
- 4 There is an overview of recruitment and retention activity, exploring in particular marketing activity and how this has impacted on our recruitment performance.
- 5 As we are aware of the importance of retention of foster carers the report provides a summary of the support provided to foster carers. In acknowledgement of the need to retain the best foster carers for Durham's children the report includes information regarding the review process for our foster carers and fostering panel activity over the last 12 months.
- 6 The report sets out the priorities for the coming year and developments to increase placement choice for our most complex young people.

Recommendations

- 7 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
- (a) Note the contents of the report.
 - (b) Consider the ways in which they can actively undertake their responsibilities as Corporate Parents and aid the retention and recruitment of the best foster carers for Durham's children.
 - (c) Acknowledge the challenges in recruiting and retaining foster carers and the direct impact on the lives of children in our care.

Background

- 8 This report provides an overview of the work of the fostering team and the challenges that are faced in securing the right fostering home for each child. Each child has differing needs and it is necessary for the service to have carers with a range of skills and abilities to meet those needs.
- 9 Some children come into care for a very short period because of an acute family crisis other children need to be cared for throughout their childhoods. Most children who need foster care have witnessed scary adult behaviour and experienced loss. They need to be provided with safe alternative family-based care until either the issues can be resolved and they can go home or the adults agree they need to stay in care.
- 10 The needs of children in care mirror those of their peers with the additionality of the trauma they have suffered. Children want to go to school, be with their friends, grow, explore, and thrive. They make mistakes and marvellous achievements, and foster carers are the adults who walk alongside them supporting them and their families as they do so throughout their childhoods.
- 11 Nationally and locally the ability to recruit foster carers is increasingly difficult. There are many theories as to the cause for this, the pandemic, family finances and cost of living pressures, negative media about children in care and social workers to name a few.
- 12 In Durham a dedicated part of the fostering team work to identify new carers, to train and recruit them. This activity takes place at planned recruitment events which while are back to face to face, did continued virtually throughout the pandemic.
- 13 The recruitment of foster carers is however only successful in meeting the sufficiency challenges if retention remains high also. This year despite a record number of newly recruited cares the overall figure of increase is 8 carers because of the number leaving.
- 14 The fostering community is aging, and some people choose to retire, or they have a change in life circumstances, others choose to foster for private agencies, often as the financial rewards are significantly higher and sometimes a foster carer falls below the expected standard and must leave. Therefore, moving forward, the recruitment activity is needed to be 4-fold of this record-breaking year.

- 15 The fostering team are ambitious and drive forward with ideas to improve their service. The development of a Mockingbird fostering hub to aid the placement of children who might otherwise need to be placed in a children's home has been well received. Lots of carers are interested in fostering in this way and it is hoped that we can establish 2 hubs within the year to allow a meaningful evaluation before we consider further expansion.
- 16 This report complies with the statutory requirements as set out under Regulation 35 (review of quality of care) of the Fostering Regulations 2011. These require the responsible individual should monitor all matters set out in Schedule 7, which relate to standards of care and the overall management of the service and to improve the quality of the foster care provided by the Fostering Service.

Conclusion

- 17 The information provided within the attached report fulfils this duty and is intended to provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of the service provided to children in care and their foster carers.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Children Act 1989 requires a local authority who are looking after a child, to place that child with a foster care, if it is not possible to arrange for the child to live with a parent or family member. The local authority's duties in relation to the fostering service are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Statutory Guidance contained in Volume 4 of the Children Act Guidance. The Regulatory Framework for the inspection of fostering services by Ofsted is contained in the Care Standards Act 2000.

Finance

This report has no direct financial implications on the planned activity and potential expenditure of this area of the service but the success of in the inhouse fostering service ensures children services can minimise the financial impact of having to source suitable externally provided placements at a higher cost.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

Appendix 2: Annual Report of Durham County Council's Fostering Service

Attached as a separate document