

## Corporate Parenting Panel

8 March 2024

## Regional Pathfinder Project Update



### Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

#### Electoral division(s) affected:

None

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update to Corporate Parenting Panel on the Regional Pathfinder Project, Foster North East.



#### Executive summary

- 2 As part of the care review all 12 Local Authorities in the North East region, including Durham County Council, came together to create a regional Hub for the recruitment of new foster carers. The regional hub is hosted by Sunderland Together for Children and has been operational since September 2023. The project is due to end April 2024, and will be evaluated in March 2024. The project is funded through the Department for Education (DfE).
- 3 Since the launch of the project Durham County Council has seen an increase in referrals for potential new foster carers and an increase in the number progressing to the assessment phase of the process.
- 4 Durham County Council (hereafter referred to as DCC) have continued to compliment the marketing activity of Foster with North East.
- 5 An update to the progress of this project is provided within the body of this report.

## Recommendations

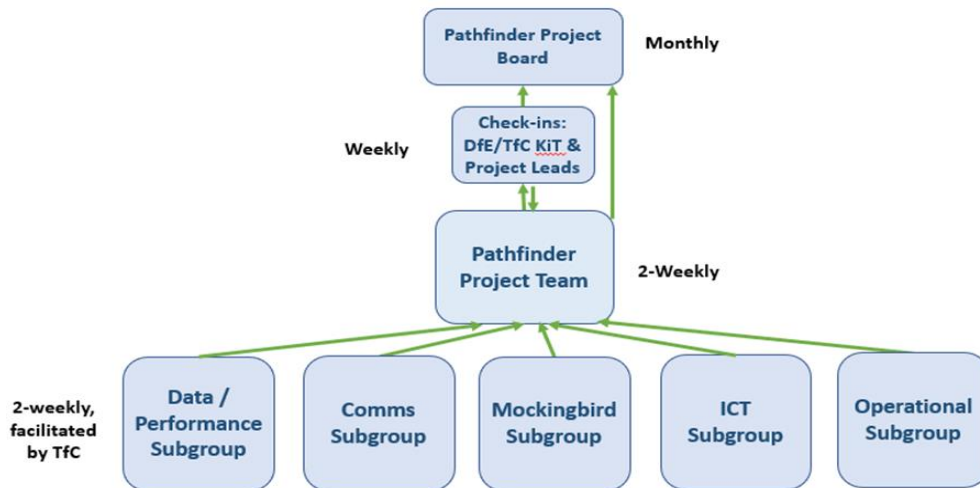
- 6 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
  - (a) note the content of the report and progress of the project; *and*
  - (b) note the project timescales of evaluation by the DfE of March 2024.

## Background

- 7 The regional fostering pathfinder project and campaign is led by the DfE working in close partnership with the North East. It is designed and targeted to meet the specific needs and provision gaps in the North East region for foster carers. While the DfE has worked with the North East to deliver a central North East campaign, this has been supported by Local Authority sign-up and commitment to the project. This is hosted by Sunderland Together for Children. The governance structure is explored later in this report.
- 8 The projects aims were to:
- (a) increase the number of foster carers in the region;
  - (b) reduce the need for Independent Foster Carers;
  - (c) reduce the need for Childrens Homes as an alternative for children due to the lack of available carers;
  - (d) reduce the number of children being moved out of the area in which they live;
  - (e) reduce the number of occasions children go missing due to being placed out of county; *and*
  - (f) bring placement stability with the introduction of the Mockingbird Programme to all Local Authorities.
- 9 To promote the project and routes to fostering for individuals within their own Local Authority, a regional communications campaign was launched supporting marketing activity across the region and looking to ensure it is targeted and effective. The project will be evaluated in March 2024 with an outcome report shared following completion.

## The Partnership Governance

- 10 The Project operates in accordance with the following governance model:

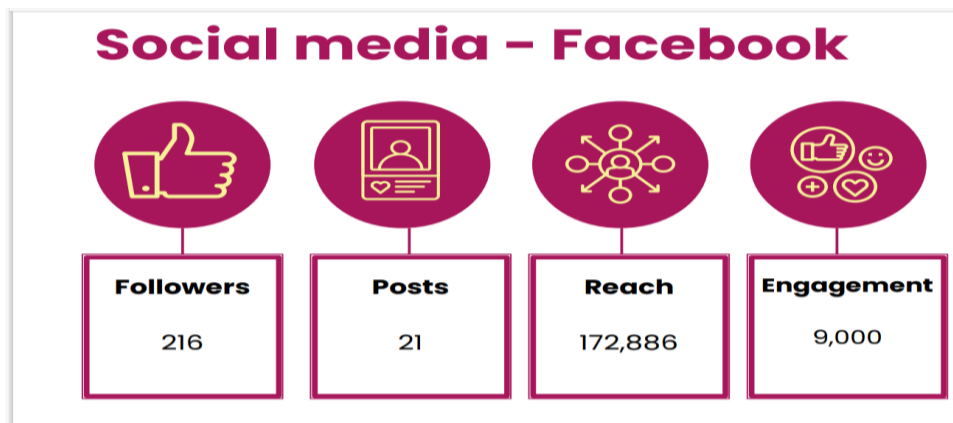


- 11 There is a monthly Board meeting for the 12 North East Local Authorities to attend and feed into service delivery. These were initially weekly when forming the partnership and reduced gradually to fortnightly and then monthly as the project progressed.
- 12 There is a monthly newsletter shared across the partnership.
- 13 There are monthly data sets produced to track progress of referrals.

### Marketing

- 14 The marketing strategy used has been to target local media platforms, TV, radio, online and printed materials to increase brand awareness and attract potential foster carers.
- 15 Review of the impact of the marketing activity is monitored in the analytical subgroup. Findings are produced and disseminated from the group to demonstrate reach and impact.

### Facebook



- 16 Activity linked with case studies and interviews are highlighted below and evaluation of the impact will be reviewed following the next circulation.

## Facebook – top posts



**Post reach - 5,139**  
**Engagement - 387**  
**Reactions - 143**  
**Comments 15**  
**Link clicks - 53**  
**Shares - 48**



**Post reach - 4,795**  
**Engagement - 138**  
**Reactions - 34**  
**Comments 0**  
**Link clicks - 56**  
**Shares - 10**



**Post reach - 1,961**  
**Engagement - 212**  
**Reactions - 69**  
**Comments - 5**  
**Link clicks - 57**  
**Shares - 14**



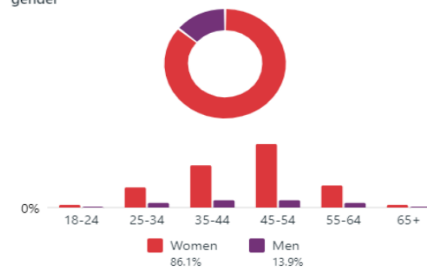
- 17 Facebook has been beneficial for the project and supported links through Facebook to the website for further information.

## Facebook – audience profile

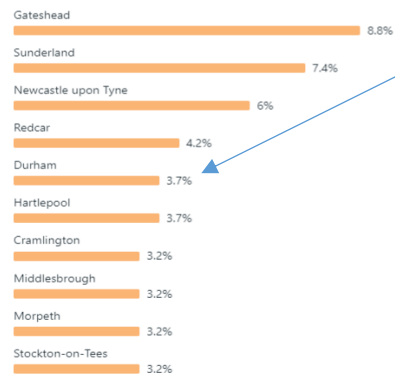
Facebook followers ⓘ

216

Age & gender ⓘ



Top towns/cities



## Instagram

- 18 The social media platform Instagram has brought in no views from County Durham.
- 19 Newcastle, Darlington, Gateshead, Sunderland and London have had 241 followers from this. The case studies had 14,932 reactions on Instagram. This is potential exposure DCC could be included in if we were to expand on the Instagram platform.
- 20 As a result of the activity seen in other Local Authorities, DCC will explore this platform further over the next quarter.

## Website

- 21 The Foster with North East website has had 31,762 visits as shared below.

### Website referrals



- 22 DCC provides the highest number of people to the Foster with North East website in comparison to the other Local Authorities. DCC has utilised established events to sharing three links with Foster with North East. As shown in the infographic, the most effective pathway to the Foster North East website is from Facebook.

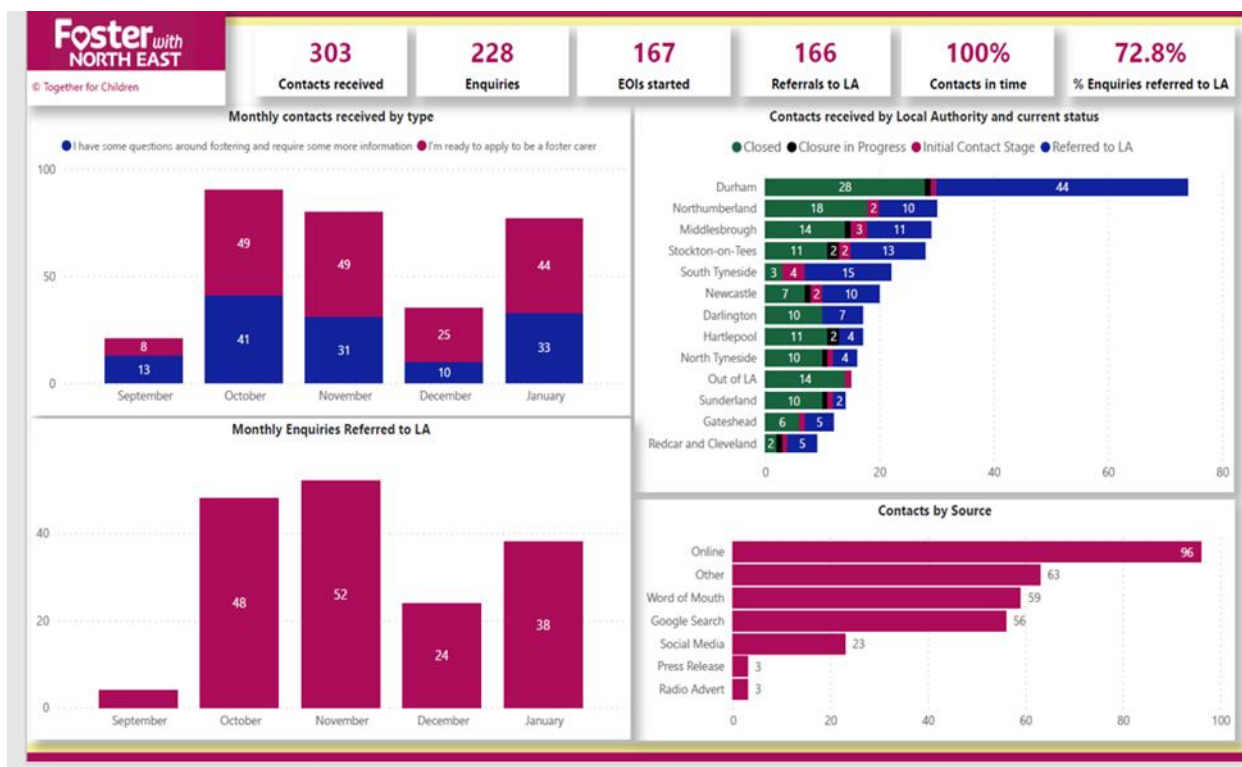
### Supplementary Marketing Activity by DCC to promote the project.

- 23 DCC has used the regional marketing templates on its Facebook and wider communications.
- 24 DCC has continued to hold recruitment activities and drop in events. We have raised the profile of the Pathfinder Project to generate interest.
- 25 DCC paid for additional bus stops to have the Pathfinder Project advertisement as we did not have much focus in comparison to the other Local Authorities.
- 26 These additional marketing points may have generated more interest than other Local Authorities which are relying solely on the Pathfinder Project to create interest.

### Conversion Activity

- 27 An overview of the number of referrals and enquiries can be found below. County Durham has the highest number of enquiries. These have translated into ten families being assessed at present.

- 28 DCC had 22 approved foster families between April 2023 to February 2024. Twenty of these were not linked to the launch of the project as some of these families started their assessment prior to April 2023, i.e. January, February and March 2023, and others had expressed their interest to foster prior to the project launch.
- 29 However, since the project was launched at the end of September we have seen a significant increase in Expressions of Interest (EOI) made to the Pathfinder Hub in relation to fostering with DCC. Of the 22 approvals, DCC is the first Local Authority to subsequently have two new families approved who attended the hub training. We are delighted the Pathfinder Marketing Team have asked to make an article/feature of the new County Durham families who have gone through the process.
- 30 Twenty further assessments are currently being undertaken, with a plan of eight coming to panel in March 2024.



- 31 There will be an evaluation of the Foster with North East Pathfinder Project in March 2024. The interviews with each local authority have commenced for this.

## **Conclusion**

32 At this stage it is too early to analyse the impact of the project. As the project progresses we will be in a position to fully analyse the benefits for County Durham. This will be further strengthened by the full DfE evaluation in March 2024.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

To be kept under review should the project be extended past March 2024.

### **Finance**

To be shared at Finance Clinic for potential costs should the project be extended after March 2024.

### **Consultation**

None

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None

### **Climate Change**

None

### **Human Rights**

None

### **Crime and Disorder**

None

### **Staffing**

None

### **Accommodation**

None

### **Risk**

The project may discontinue.

### **Procurement**

This has been to legal services for a NE12 agreement. Approved at Cabinet.