

Corporate Parenting Panel

19 July 2024

Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2023 - 2024



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 The Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2023-2024 outlines the work of the Fostering Service during the period 2023-24 and the activity of the Fostering Panels.
- 2 The annual report is attached at appendix 2 of this cover report.

Executive Summary

- 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 agencies.
- 4 There is an overview of recruitment and retention activity, exploring Foster with North East and the new Pathfinder Hub 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 the children of County Durham, the report includes information regarding the review process for our foster carers and fostering panel activity over the last 12 months.
- 6 The report also provides details of the Mockingbird model and how it has expanded over this period.
- 7 The report provides an update on progress against key priorities of 2023 and highlights key priorities for 2024/2025.

Recommendations

- 8 Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
 - (a) Note the content of the Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2023-2024;
 - (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; *and*
 - (c) Acknowledge the challenges in recruiting and retaining foster carers and the direct impact on the lives of children in our care.

Background

- 9 This report provides an update in relation to the activity of the fostering service over the last 12 months.
- 10 The report covers the Placement Stability and Sufficiency strategy, fostering panels, fostering and Liquid Logic and Signs of Safety, the continued focus on the voice of a child and the Mockingbird Model.

Conclusion

- 11 The report highlights key priorities for the 2024/2025. Progress against these priorities will be reported in next year's annual report.
- 12 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 carer 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 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

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2023 - 2024

Attached as separate document