

Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association Report

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 16 November 2022

From: Ricky Cooper Assistant Director, Children's Services
Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People's Services

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Outcome: The Sub-Committee is being asked to note the work of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association with Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Service.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

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1. Background

1.1 Overview of activity

- 1.2 This report has been prepared to update the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on participation activity and collaborative working with Cambridgeshire Foster Carers, and to provide an overview of relevant service development activity. Due to availability of the CFCA, this report has been drafted by Despina Kaoura and content agreed by the Vice Chair Tracey Stephenson.
- 1.3 The Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (CFCA) meet monthly where possible and the Annual General Meeting will take place in December 2022. During this quarter the CFCA were only able to meet in July and September due to August being a particularly busy holiday month.
- 1.4 Foster Carers representatives on the CFCA are:
Kevin Arrowsmith (Chair), Tracey Stephenson (Vice-Chair), Ann Bradford (Treasurer).
Stuart Currie, Julian Ayres and Nicky Flowers continue as Association members in support of the Chair and Vice-Chair (amongst others).
- 1.5 The CFCA have a wealth of fostering experience along with individual inter-personal skills which they bring with them to support the Foster Carer Community. The service works closely with the members of the CFCA throughout the year to ensure the voice and views of Cambridgeshire Foster Carers is heard and remains central to plans for service development.
- 1.6 The Fostering Service continues to attend meetings with the CFCA to hear feedback from Foster Carers on what is working well and what Foster Carers feel needs to be considered or addressed by the Fostering Service and Children's Teams within the wider Children's Services. The Head of Service for Fostering, the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and the Support and Supervision Service Manager for Fostering are also invited to attend the CFCA meetings.
- 1.7 The Head of Service for Fostering continues to meet monthly with the Chair and Vice-Chair of both the CFCA and the Peterborough Foster Carer Community, which provides the opportunity to discuss service developments and plans in more detail, and to review feedback from Foster Carers received at formal meetings. In October, the Head of Service alongside key managers also hosted an informal meeting attended by a number of foster carers from across both Local Authorities which raised a productive discussion on topics such as: Cost of Living, re-imbursement for Children's emergency clothing and other items, complex needs of children coming into the care system and support needs of carers, the updated Clinical Offer, and new transport Portal, (amongst other topics).
- 1.8 The CFCA are invited to be involved in a range of work schemes being initiated within the service and are very proactive in providing their experience, knowledge, and skills to support service development.

- 1.9 The service continues to invite foster carers to be actively involved in and contribute to a range of new and established initiatives and working groups e.g., the existing carer retention working group. The carer retention work is ongoing with the group meeting monthly and continues to be supported by carers from both Local Authorities. The impact of the group and the work to develop our approach to carers at risk of stopping fostering (for any reason) has been evident in improved foster carer retention and positive feedback from carers.
- 1.10 It is clear that our new approach, which is informed by carer experience, is having a positive impact on the way we respond to our carers, and is becoming embedded into daily practice, for example supporting all carers undergoing any kind of investigation into their practice with access to peer support as well as more formal support as part of policy and procedure.
- 1.11 The group includes staff from across the service in order that retention of carers becomes embedded into the culture of the service from the starting point of our foster carers' journey into fostering.
- 1.12 The Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors from within the Fostering Community continue to work alongside the service supporting recruitment activity and raising the awareness of Private Fostering in their communities using their wealth of knowledge and experience of the fostering task. We are also supported in this area by our local elected Member Champion.
- 1.13 We continue to work together with carers to develop our Mentoring Scheme; mentors are allocated to and support carers who might be experiencing a difficult time in their fostering role, e.g., those who are subject to an allegation or Standards of Care investigation. Currently we have one Foster Carer Mentor who has been trained and supported by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to offer support to carers. We hope to increase this offer to at least two specialist mentors across the service. Experienced Foster Carer Mentors are matched to and provide support to carers who are new to the service, in assessment or undertaking a fostering task which may be unfamiliar to them.
- 1.14 Face to face (in person) Support Groups for carers have returned (following the pandemic) and are being held in easily accessible community venues across the County. The service ensures support groups are held in the north, south, east and west of the County to enable as many carers as possible to attend without significant travel time implications for carers. Some virtual Support Groups will continue for specific meetings i.e., for those times which may prove difficult for carers to attend, for instance evening meetings. There are four Support Groups for Cambridgeshire Carers including the group focussed on caring for teenage children. This is a monthly (virtual) Support Group and is offered to both CCC and PCC carers of teenage young people and the very specific needs they present with. This has been welcomed by carers from CCC and PCC. Both Foster Carer forums have been very proactive in attending and supporting these groups.
- 1.15 The Service has fully supported carers from the CFCA and PFCC to organise and attend a day out at Wicksteed Park with all the children and young people in their care and birth children. This activity proved to be very enjoyable for all, much fun was had by our children, carers and a meet and greet was hosted by our staff.

- 1.16 The service is busy organising the Annual Foster Carer Awards which is held to celebrate our Fostering Community. This is taking place on 18 November at Burgess Hall in St Ives. It is hoped that this event will be well attended and enjoyed by all.
- 1.17 The Fostering Service has implemented a 'Feedback Loop' System. This is a new initiative whereby specific issues raised by the Foster Carer forums are collated and discussed with the relevant areas of the wider children's services. Responses are collated and then shared with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

Main issues

- 2.1 The CFCA held two meetings in the second quarter of 2022. The following matters were raised/discussed:
- 2.2 **Transport:** Foster Carers continue to experience issues with transport, particularly at the start of the new (Autumn) school term. Foster Carers report that there continue to be instances where taxis have not been provided for children's appointments or where a child's transport needs have needed to be changed, however carers are unable to make these changes. Carers also report that they continue to have difficulties making contact with Social Workers to inform of changes to journeys in a timely manner.
- 2.3 Foster Carers have suggested a system whereby the Foster Carer arranges the transport or makes changes to transport arrangements when needed with the transport service which is then authorised by the child's Social Worker. Foster Carers feel as they are managing the children's daily activities that this would support improvement.
- 2.4 **Service response:** The Fostering Head of Service and Service Manager will be discussing the suggestions provided by Foster Carers with the Assistant Director for Education Capital and Placement Planning. It is anticipated that this meeting will take place by mid-November. The service is also keen to explore a system whereby urgent requests for transport to school can be instigated by the Fostering Service at the point a child moves into a fostering household.
- 2.5 Representatives from the Fostering Service continue to attend all Transport Development meetings to share the experience of Foster Carers and the children they look after. There has been some delay with the launch of the new transport portal and that the team continues to work with all departments to ensure all service area needs are met.
- 2.6 **Junior ISAs and Trust Fund Accounts:** Foster Carers continue to seek clarity in regard to procedures around the opening of ISAs/Trust Fund Accounts for Children in Care. Ideally Foster Carers would like one point of contact to advise on savings/ISA accounts and a dedicated email for this activity. Foster Carers have also asked for an update in regard to pocket money expectations, the policy being on hold whilst carer feedback was considered.
- 2.7 **Service Response:** The responsible Service Manager will be escalating their request for clarity to colleagues in the Corporate Parenting Service and will discuss the need to develop a clear procedure for Foster Carers and suggestions regarding a single point of contact. We apologise that there has been a delay in achieving clarity around expectations relating to the pocket money Foster Carers should be giving children. We recognise this is outstanding and a request for resolution has been raised with senior management.

- 2.8 **Rising energy costs:** Foster Carers have recently received an additional payment from the Local Authority in recognition of the rising energy costs. The majority of carers have responded to say they are grateful for his recognition by the Local Authority. Carers, however, did express their concerns and some anxiety with regards to the issues around the increasing cost of living.
- 2.9 **Service response:** The service recognises the national, local and fostering specific challenges related to the increase in energy costs and general cost of living. In addition to the financial recognition which has been made to carers, the service has also shared, and will continue to share via the newsletter, details of organisations offering advice and guidance and Foster Carers can also access the Council's Employee Assistance Programme which also offers additional source of information and advice.
- 2.10 **Children's passports:** Foster Carers have raised that they continue to experience delays in passports being applied for. Carers have requested guidance with regard to who can and who should apply for passports and when this should be done.
- 2.11 **Service response:** The Fostering Service has been working with the wider Children's Service to develop a passport procedure. The Passports for Children in Care Procedure has been drafted and shared for comment with the Chair and Vice Chair. Once comments have been reviewed, the procedure will be implemented. This is planned for mid-November and the service will share this with both Foster Carer forums and staff followed by the wider Fostering Community in the December newsletter.
- 2.12 **Children's emergency clothing and personal items:** Foster Carers have raised that child newly into care can arrive at their home without the clothing and personal care items that they need. Whilst the cost for these is reimbursed to carers, Foster Carers are concerned that not all carers will have the have the funds to buy these items immediately.
- 2.13 **Service response:** The Fostering Service will ensure Supervising Social Workers are proactive in ensuring that carers are aware of what they can apply for in relation to the emergency clothing allowance as detailed in the Foster Carer Handbook. The Fostering Service is undertaken a review of its internal financial processes relating to this activity and will streamline where possible to ensure timely payment. Where there is uncertainty about who is responsible for funding certain items or activities, the Fostering Service is also responsible for resolving this with colleagues from across the wider organisation.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

- 3.1 Environment and Sustainability
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.2 Health and Care
There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.3 Places and Communities
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.4 Children and Young People
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.5 Transport
There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Implications

5.1 None

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 None.