

## Report from the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association and the Fostering Service

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 29 March 2023

From: Ricky Cooper, Assistant Director

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The Sub-Committee is being asked to note the work of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association and the Fostering Service.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report.

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 This is an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee from the Cambridgeshire County Council Foster Carer's Association and the fostering service.
- 1.2 As of 01 March 2023, there are 163 registered Foster Carers to Cambridgeshire County Council.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared to update the Corporate Parenting Committee on the continued participation activity and collaborative working between Cambridgeshire County Council's fostering service and the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers.

## 2 Main Issues

### 2.1 Overview of activity

- 2.1 Cambridgeshire County Council's Fostering Service continues to work in partnership with the Foster Carer's Association to ensure that Foster Carer's views are understood and to support service development.
- 2.2 Foster Carers representatives on the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (CFCA) are: Tracey Stephenson (Chair) Kevin Arrowsmith (Vice Chair), Anna Williamson (treasurer), whilst Stuart Currie, Julian Ayres, Nikki Flowers, Jen Madams and Barbara Hall continue as Association members in support of the Chair and Vice Chair and committee business.
- 2.3 Since the last Corporate Parenting Committee, the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association have a new Chair in Tracey Stephenson, with Kevin Arrowsmith stepping down to Vice Chair. During this period of change the frequency of meetings was impacted upon, however with the planned AGM ahead, the frequency of meetings will be reinstated too monthly. The new Chair will host a Foster Carer survey to explore and plan the business for the coming year of the CFCA.
- 2.4 The CFCA brings significant experience of fostering, caring for and working with children and/or other relevant experience (both collectively and individually) and transferable skills and knowledge along with individual inter-personal skills into 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 are heard and remains central (alongside outcomes for children) to plans for service development.
- 2.5 The Fostering Service will continue 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 service and children's social work teams within the wider Children's Services. The CFCA will consider who from the service will attend meetings to support and escalate concerns or issues as appropriate. The CFCA also highlights to the service what CCC does well.

- 2.6 The Head of Service for Fostering, who is new in the role, has continued the existing practice of meeting bi-monthly with the Chair and Vice Chair of both the CFCA (and our Peterborough Foster Carer Community), which provides the opportunity to get to know carers and the service, including beginning to understand both the strengths and developmental needs of the service from all perspectives. The Head of Service will be able to share information regarding service developments and plans in more detail and to review feedback from Foster Carers received at formal meetings.
- 2.7 The Fostering Service and the CFCA continue to be actively involved in and contribute to a range of new and established initiatives and working groups.
- 2.8 The existing carer retention working group continues to meet monthly and is 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. In this financial year 2022/23 we have retained 13 fostering households who might have been considering leaving CCC fostering or leaving fostering altogether. The group includes staff from across the fostering service in both PCC and CCC 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. 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.
- 2.9 The Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors from within the Fostering Community continue to support the service, they promote the service within their local communities in both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire as well as ensuring literature is provided to community groups and organisations such as schools. They work alongside the service supporting recruitment activity and raising the awareness of the need to recruit more Foster Carers and to talk about Private Fostering in their communities using their wealth of knowledge and experience of the fostering task. Ambassadors support by scheduling and attending community and recruitment events such as attending the Christmas lights and Pride events etc. As a joint service across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough we continue to be supported in this area by a Peterborough elected Member Champion. The Ambassadors have recently supported one of the Foster Carer coffee mornings specifically for those in the enquiry and assessment stage to come along and speak with an Ambassador and ask questions about the fostering task, this has received positive feedback from applicants. The service plans to develop this by spreading this practice across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.
- 2.10 We continue to work together with carers to develop our Mentoring Scheme; Mentors are allocated and matched at the point of approval to all new Foster Carers. We will be further developing this practice to individuals going through the assessment stage to become a Foster Carer. The Mentors already host a monthly virtual drop-in session for all those in assessment, supporting them through the Mentors lived experiences. Mentors also help other Foster Carers with unfamiliar tasks and to support their progression. Mentors are allocated to 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. This will be developed to increase the cohort of carers who can offer this support.

- 2.11 Face to face (in person) Support Groups for carers continue. Support Groups are being held in easily accessible community venues across the county in the north, south, east and west to enable as many carers to attend as possible without significant travel time. Some virtual Support Groups are continuing for specific meetings i.e., for those times which may prove difficult for carers to attend, for instance evening meetings. Cambridgeshire offers four face to face Support Groups each month as well as one virtual group plus one group focussed caring for teenage children.
- 2.12 The Fostering Service plans to hold an Easter Activity Day on 01 April for all fostering households. We are also planning a summer picnic at Hinchbrook Park in June as well as the annual Wickstead Park event in August. The Participation Team are also in the process of organising the Annual Children in Care Celebration event in July (date TBC).
- 2.13 The Fostering Service has implemented a 'Feedback Loop' System. This is an 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 of the Associations. The Corporate Parenting Service alongside the Fostering Service are reconsidering the terms of reference for this scheme as there are new staff in place across the board.
- 2.14 The service continues to work across children's social care to support resolutions to issues raised by Foster Carers:
- 2.15 A new transport booking portal is awaited which is anticipated to solve some of the transport issues highlighted by Foster Carers and give them more autonomy to book and cancel transport. It should also help with issues of communication. The Fostering Service Manager is actively working with the transport department and other parts of children's social care to support this activity and escalate issues arising.
- 2.16 The service is currently working with our corporate parenting colleagues to ensure that there is clarity about how Foster Carers open Junior ISAs and Trust Fund Accounts. Foster Carers are requesting a single point of contact within the Council to support them on this activity.
- 2.17 The service is currently working with our corporate parenting colleagues to ensure that children's passports are applied for in a timely way to ensure that Foster Carers can take children on holidays and to enable the older young people to have a passport as a form of identity.
- 2.18 The Local Authority recognises the difficult financial climate in which Foster Carers find themselves. Carers are supported to come to the service with any specific difficulties and are provided with forums to express their concerns and anxiety with regards to the issues around the increasing cost of living. The service has also shared, and will continue to share via the newsletter, details of organisations offering advice and guidance. Foster Carers can also access the Council's Employee Assistance Programme which also offers additional sources of information, support, and advice. The service will be making a further one off £250 cost of living payment to Foster Carers on 24 March, whilst agreement is sought over the annual

allowance uplift across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for 2023-2024. The service and the CFCA would also like support to whether any Council Tax exemptions or discounts could be applied to Foster Carers across the five Council districts.

### 3. Alignment with corporate priorities

#### 3.1 Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications for this priority.

#### 3.2 Health and Care

#### 3.3 Places and Communities

The Fostering Service enables local support groups and training for Foster Carers.

#### 3.4 Children and Young People

The Fostering Service ensures that children and young people are safe from harm and lead healthy lives. Children and young people are confident, resilient, thrive in their learning and engage positively and actively in their communities. The Fostering Service supports Care Leavers through the Staying Put Scheme and also to learn independence skills.

The Fostering Service ensures every Child gets the best start in life – with more children and young people in care finding permanent, safe and stable homes and support to care leavers to access a good, enhanced local offer that meets their health, education, housing and employment needs.

#### 3.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

### 4. Significant Implications

#### 4.1 n/a

### 5. Background papers

#### 5.1 None