

Foster Carer Update

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 15 November 2023

From: Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Service

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

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

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

Officer contact:
Name: Despina Kaoura
Post: Service Manager
Email: despina.kaoura@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07834 698143

Name: Jo Spender
Post: Head of Service
Email: Jo. Spender@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07469526868

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 1st October 2023, there are 169 registered Foster Carers to Cambridgeshire County Council.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared to update the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on the continued participation activity and collaborative working between Cambridgeshire County Council's Fostering Service and the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers.

2. Main Issues

Overview of activity

- 2.1 National Minimum Payments/annual uplift
- 2.2 The Government national minimum standard for foster carer fee's related to children was increased by 12.43% with effect from 6 April 2023. The Fostering Service did not implement a blanket 12.43 increase as they have historically paid above the minimum anyway. However, it was agreed to raise the total fostering allowance which is made up of the child maintenance and the foster skills element to an increase 7% which was announced to foster carers on the 31 July and backdated to 6 April.
- 2.3 There was a delay in agreeing this increase due to negotiations with Peterborough Council, due to the shared fostering service. It is important to note that due to the complexities and the nature of foster carers payments the increases take substantial time and effort to implement but this was completed mid-October 2023.
- 2.4 Recruitment and Retention
- 2.5 There has been a focus on recruitment and retention in the last quarter. Since 1 April 2023, there has been 8 foster carer household approvals. There have been 65 enquiries and there are 29 applicants in assessment. There has been focused recruitment through 'Refer a Friend' and acquiring support from other teams and services. This has resulted in significant increase in Refer a Friend referrals from 4 in the last financial year to 11 since April.
- 2.6 There have been 16 resignations of foster carers to date this financial year. The reasons for the resignations have been due to ill health, retirement, safeguarding concerns, changes in circumstances and change of geographical location. There have only been two foster carers who have cited resignation due to being unhappy with the service from the child's social work teams. The service continues to offer retention visits to any foster carers who consider leaving the service and these visits have been very successful in retaining foster carers.
- 2.7 CFCA recommends there needs to be some focus placed upon additional resources within the fostering service such as support workers, educational workers to effectively support the increasing needs of children and the impact of this on the fostering role.

2.8 The 'uncoupling' of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils

- 2.9 There will be some leadership changes within the fostering service with a change of Service Director and Head of Service. The new Service Director for Cambridgeshire will be changing from Brian Relph who is interim to a permanent Service Director named Ranjit Chambers. There has also been a new permanent Head of Service recruited and it is envisaged that he will start in post in January 2024.
- 2.10 Within the Fostering Service, the 'uncoupling' of Cambridgeshire from Peterborough council is now the priority. The aim of the separation is to do so with minimum disruption to foster carers, children and staff, whilst still maintaining a business-as-usual approach.
- 2.11 The official date of the separation of services is 1 November 2023. However, this is only the official date and it is not possible for the whole of the Peterborough fostering service to transfer back on this date, due to significant staff resources. There are several vacancies in the PCC staff structure that need to be recruited to and this work is currently underway. Therefore, the PCC and CCC fostering services are currently working to a shared 'uncoupling' plan, whereby different parts of the fostering service will 'uncouple' in a strategic and planned manner.
- 2.12 Training will continue to be delivered jointly for CCC and PCC foster carers until at least 31 March 2024, so there will no change to the booking system and to the training of foster carers. If any foster carers are booked onto a training course after 1 November 2023 they should plan to attend.
- 2.13 It is proposed we will continue with our fostering recruitment joint branding into the new year and marketing campaigns will continue jointly until January 2024. To this point the recruitment of carers will remain jointly until PCC have recruited to the vacancies in the recruitment service the separation has caused.
- 2.14 From CFCA viewpoint, there has been significant challenges in looking after children from Peterborough such as transport, schools' family time arrangements and PCC processes. Although there has been concern of foster carers who are still caring for children from Peterborough post the 'uncoupling' and how this will be managed ongoing in terms of logistics and practicalities of the care arrangements.
- 2.15 The CFCA acknowledge that it has been an extremely busy time for Cambridgeshire Council with the 'uncoupling'. However, we feel that it is very important to keep us informed of any new initiatives of significant developments in the service.
- 2.16 Overall, the Foster Carers and Staff in Cambridgeshire County Council are positive about the process of 'uncoupling' from Peterborough Fostering Service.

3. Alignment with the Council's ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

There are no significant implications for this priority.

- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care to meet this priority.

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care to meet this priority.

3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

The recommendations outlined in this report should support the development of practice for children in our care to meet this priority.

3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

4. Significant Implications

Not applicable

5. Source documents

5.1 None