

**FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT UPDATE**

*To:* **Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **19 September 2018**

*From:* **John Heron  
Residential and Placements Provisions Manager**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Purpose:* **To provide an update to the Sub-Committee on foster carer recruitment activity.**

*Recommendation:* **The Committee is asked to note the report.**

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## **Summary:**

One of the most important responsibilities of any Local Authority is the provision of care for children and young people who are not able to live with their birth families because of abuse or neglect. Under section 22G of the Children Act 1989 Local Authorities have a duty to ensure that there are enough placements for children who need to be Looked After. For most children and young people, being brought up in a caring family where their interests and education is promoted will improve their life chances and future prospects.

To make sure that Cambridgeshire County Council has enough foster carers for the children and young people who need them, the Council has agreed to invest extra money through transformation funding. This extra investment is focussed on the recruitment of more foster carers and making sure we have the staff needed to support them. To do this we use publicity to let people know what it might be like to be a foster carer.

This report provides an update regarding foster carer recruitment.

## **1. Background.**

- 1.1 In order to provide a high quality fostering service that is responsive and able to meet the needs of all the children and young people requiring placements it is necessary to recruit a range of local families, with a mix of skills and experience, who are well trained and able to provide different types of foster care in sufficient numbers.
- 1.2 Not having enough foster carers often means that children cannot be placed with the right foster carers, in their own area, or brothers and sisters may have to be placed in separate foster families. If the right foster family is not available straight away the child may have to be placed temporarily with alternative carers and then moved again within a short space of time.
- 1.3 A lack of appropriate “in house” foster care provision can also mean that it is necessary for the Local Authority to purchase placements from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). There are a growing number of such organisations operating in the region. IFA placements are costly, often out of the authority and at a distance from the child’s own home meaning that it is more difficult and costly to maintain school placements and contact with family and friends.
- 1.4 At the end of June 2018 there were 701 children being looked after by Cambridgeshire County Council. Of these, 519 children (74%) were being after looked within foster families. 302 of these (58%) were provided by IFA’s and the remaining 217 (42%) were provided through in-house services.
- 1.5 The average cost of IFA placements purchased by Cambridgeshire is around £800 per week. The average weekly placement cost for an in-house foster placement is £400. Having a range and choice of placement types (such as short-term, long term, placements for teenagers, parent and child etc) which are provided through our in-house service is

better for children and families and cheaper for the local authority. It is imperative that we recruit more in house foster carers.

## **2. MAIN ISSUES**

- 2.1 Since April 2018 the Fostering Recruitment and Training Team (FRAT) has recruited seven new foster families across the county. Together these foster carers are providing an additional 13 foster placements. Another 13 prospective foster carer households are currently being assessed.
- 2.2 In order to recruit these carers the fostering service has run a number of advertising campaigns using social media, radio advertising and press releases. This activity has generated 164 enquiries to-date. By far the most successful recruitment activity so far this year was a newsletter sent out through Cambridgeshire schools in July. This generated 62 enquiries in July alone almost matching the number of enquiries received in April, May and June.
- 2.3 However, on average only one person in every ten who makes an enquiry goes on to be approved as a foster carer. This is a national figure for all fostering services including IFA's. Therefore, it is expected that of the 164 enquiries only 16 new fostering households will go on to foster Cambridgeshire children.
- 2.4 In order to meet the demand for in-house foster placements and compete with the IFA's operating in the Cambridgeshire district, Cambridgeshire County Council General Purposes Committee (GPC) has agreed investment in this area from the Transformation Fund over a three year period. 40 new foster placements are needed each year over the next three years.

- 2.5 The GPC have agreed additional investment for 2018-19 as follows:

• Up-front marketing investment through three years tender; up to:	£225,000
• Additional capacity – marketing officers:	£80,000
• Staffing capacity – recruitment, support and business support:	£210,000
• Marketing – direct campaign costs	£20,000
• Other recruitment incentives including introduction fees and golden hellos:	£70,000
• Additional funds to improve support for foster carers:	£100,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£705,000</b>

On-going investment in future years will be met from savings in the placement budget from increased in-house provision and anticipated reductions in the number of Looked after Children.

- 2.6 Utilising this funding, a three year fostering recruitment strategy is being devised in conjunction with a local media company, PS. Media, the corporate Communications Team, the Fostering Service and a focus group consisting of Foster Carers, Councillor Simon Bywater (Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee) and Cambridgeshire County Council staff.
- 2.7 New branding has been developed to ensure the in-house fostering service stands out in the fostering market place. Additionally a new major recruitment campaign is due to be

launched on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at the Abbey Stadium, Cambridge United Football Club. The launch will be attended by the Deputy Lord-Lieutenant, Mrs Judy Pearson, Cambridgeshire County Council Elected Members, Senior Officers, Foster Carers and staff of the fostering service. The concept for the campaign is 'Team Cambridgeshire' Join our Fostering Team.

- 2.8 The campaign pulls together a number of local companies and organisations who have agreed to become 'Campaign Partners' supporting the campaign in various ways. Many have agreed to carry our publicity materials on their websites and share our recruitment information within their staff groups. Others have offered advertising space or printed materials. Cambridge United have offered the use of the stadium for the launch of the campaign and along with Peterborough United are also supporting by providing members of the football team to endorse the campaign.

Campaign partners enlisted so far include;

- Cambridge United Football Club
- Peterborough United Football Club
- Heart FM
- Archant News Papers - Wisbech Standard, Cambridge Times, Ely Standard Hunts Post
- Cambridge Independent.
- Peterborough Telegraph
- Stagecoach Busses
- Print Solutions
- Wildcat Theatre Group
- BGL Insurance Group
- Network Rail
- North West Anglia Trust
- BBC look East
- Cambridgeshire Police and Fire
- Cambridgeshire Libraries

- 2.9 The fostering pages of Cambridgeshire County Council's webpage have been refreshed and PS. Media have produced video content for use on the website and across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter etc). We have also arranged Adwords and Search Engine Optimisation to ensure that the Cambridgeshire County Council fostering web pages are delivered at the top of the page whenever prospective foster carers are researching fostering agencies on the internet.

- 2.9.0 Attracting interest and applications to foster is only part of the recruitment task. Without the capacity to process enquiries and applications the above activity will lose impact. Therefore In order to deal with the anticipated increase in the number of fostering enquiries and applications, additional staffing for the fostering service is being planned to ensure an efficient recruitment pipeline, including additional marketing, training and business support as well as social work capacity. The role and function of the fostering panel is also being reviewed to ensure that the panel process is efficient and able to meet the increased demand.

- 2.9.1 The support offer to foster carers is being reviewed to ensure appropriate clinical support and effective engagement through a foster carer association.

### **3. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

#### **3.1 Resource Implications**

The fostering service is delivered within the available budget and at a high standard. There are no significant implications from this report.

#### **3.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**

The media company engaged for this project, PS.Media, is on the council procurement framework.

#### **3.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications**

None

#### **3.4 Equality and Diversity Implications**

None

#### **3.5 Engagement and Communications Implications**

The Corporate Communications team are part of the focus group and will assist with oversight of any proposed communication and engagement activity.

#### **3.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

None

#### **3.7 Public Health Implications**

None

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>General Purposes Committee report re: Transforming Outcomes for Children and Young People in Care</b>	<a href="https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccclive/Committees/tabid/62/ctl/ViewCMIS_CommitteeDetails/mid/381/id/2/Default.aspx">https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccclive/Committees/tabid/62/ctl/ViewCMIS_CommitteeDetails/mid/381/id/2/Default.aspx</a>  or contact John Heron at: <a href="mailto:John.Heron@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">John.Heron@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>