

Report from Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 23 March 2022

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

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Key decision: No

Outcome: This report has been submitted on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Fostering Community, the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association and Fostering Service.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of the report
- b) Raise any queries they have with the lead officers

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to update the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on engagement activity with the Cambridgeshire Fostering Community, and to provide an overview of development activity Foster Carers have participated in within the service.
- 1.2 The Fostering Service has attended meetings with the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (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 colleagues within the wider children's services. The first meeting of the CFCA this financial year took place on 11 January 2022 and further meetings have been held on 08 February 2022 and 08 March 2022. The Head of Service for Fostering and the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting are also invited to attend the CFCA meetings.
- 1.3 The Head of Service for Fostering also meets monthly with the Chair and Vice Chair of the CFCA and the Peterborough Foster Carer Committee (PFCC) which is a good opportunity to discuss service developments and plans in more detail and to review feedback from Foster Carers received at formal meetings.
- 1.4 In addition to the CFCA meetings, the Assistant Director for Fostering also meets regularly with Foster Carers. At the last 'Coffee and Cake' informal meeting held in February, Foster Carers raised the following:
 - Foster Carers requested that the service does more to raise awareness of the CFCA. The service is working with both the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Chairs and has identified opportunities to support this. The service is committed to supporting the awareness of the CFCA and PFCC within the wider Fostering Community.
 - A request was made to review Foster Carer Agreements. This is underway and a revised agreement will be sent to all carers in April.
 - Foster Carers are concerned about the cost of Lateral Flow Tests, particularly considering requests to test for children in school. The service has discussed this further with Senior Leaders and will report back to the CFCA shortly on the outcome of these discussions.
 - Foster Carers raised that the paperwork they are asked to complete can be onerous and time-consuming. The service recognises this and will review the paperwork it asks Foster Carers to complete to ensure that it is as streamlined as possible. Decreasing the amount of paperwork both for Foster Carers and fostering staff is a key priority for this coming year.
 - Foster Carers said that there are many positives to fostering for the Local Authority as opposed to an Independent Agency. The service welcomes the involvement of carers who have the lived experience of working in an Independent Agency to work alongside the service to promote recruitment activity.
 - Foster Carers have noted the revised format of the Foster Carer Newsletter and felt the breakdown of performance activity provided was informative.
- 1.5 It is also noted that the service has successfully engaged Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors from within the Fostering Community, and there are four roles within Cambridgeshire. A Fostering Recruitment Ambassador will 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.

Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors:

- Support the Fostering Service to increase marketing and recruitment activity across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Work with the service to develop recruitment campaigns and marketing material
- Undertake initial visits with fostering staff to prospective foster carers
- Attend Information Sessions with our Recruitment Officers,
- Link with local communities with the support of Think Communities and faith groups to identify opportunities to increase the awareness of Private Fostering and fostering as a career
- Work with the service to encourage businesses, district councils and other Council departments to offer our carers discounts and concessionary memberships
- Represent the Service at strategic meetings and events including meetings with partners and stakeholders
- Engage with the wider Fostering Community to produce ideas and initiatives focussed on recruitment

- 1.6 Foster Carers have also attended a presentation with the service on the Journey2Foster training course offer. Following feedback in the Foster Carer Survey conducted in 2021, the service did refresh the training it delivers to prospective Foster Carers (Skills to Foster) but following the presentation and feedback from the Foster Carers who attended, the service will be adopting the Journey2Foster course instead. It is hoped this will commence in the summer.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 Foster Carers have asked the service to support the CFCA to raise the profile of the Association and have requested that the service share the contact details for Foster Carers from the wider Foster Community. Foster Carers would like the service to consider whether they can be provided with Cambridgeshire County Council email addresses.
- 2.2 Whilst the service is unable to share the contact details of all Foster Carers with the CFCA, the service reconfirms the commitment to support raising the profile of both the Foster Carer Association in Cambridgeshire and the Foster Carer Committee in Peterborough.

The service will do the following and invites the CFCA to provide further suggestions on how it could further support the CFCA with this:

- Including information provided by the CFCA and PFCC in the Foster Carer Newsletter which is sent to all in the Fostering Community. Information about the CFCA and PFCC was included in the January Newsletter and the service invites material for future issues.
- Inviting the CFCA and PFCC to a training session with prospective Foster Carers just prior to their attendance at Foster Panel where they are approved. It is anticipated this will commence in the summer.

- Including information about the CFCA and PFCC on the Fostering Service website. This will be supported by the service's Communications Manager who has contacted the Chairs to commence this activity.
- Inviting the CFCA and PFCC to hold a publicity stall at the New Carers Event to be held on 13 May 2022 where the service will celebrate Foster Carers who have joined our community during the height of the pandemic to date.
- Ensuring Supervising Social Workers share information about the CFCA and PFCC with the Foster Carers they support, depending on which Council they foster for. The CFCA is currently refreshing their introduction letter which was completed in early 2020.

- 2.3 The service confirms that, regrettably, it is not possible to provide Foster Carers with Council email addresses. It has been clarified that email addresses cannot be provided in isolation of other network services provided to Council Officers or Council employees.
- 2.4 Foster Carers have noted that the Chair of CFCA has met with the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee and Senior Leaders to discuss the role of the CFCA at the Sub Committee meetings. It was agreed that the Head of Service for Fostering and Corporate Parenting would meet monthly with the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee which will ensure the Voice of Foster Carers is heard. It was also agreed that the CFCA will share the full minutes of Association meetings with the Chair of Sub Committee.
- 2.5 The service welcomes this development and monthly meetings between the Heads of Service and the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub Committee are taking place. This has provided an opportunity to have more detailed discussions about all areas effecting children and young people in care, including Foster Carers. The agreement to share the minutes of the CFCA meetings with the Chair of the Sub Committee is also welcomed and has been replicated in Peterborough.
- 2.6 Foster Carers have raised their concern about the challenges they are having with securing dental appointments. Whilst acknowledging this is a county wide and potentially a national issue, Foster Carers want to ensure that the child they care for can access dental treatment when they need to and that an NHS dental practice will prioritise Children in Care. Foster Carers also felt it was important to receive feedback on the outcome of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).
- 2.7 The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting, Myra O'Farrell, confirms that she is in regular discussion with Health Leads about the availability of dental appointments and that a letter has been sent to NHS England from both the Cambridgeshire Corporate Parenting Sub Committee and the Peterborough Corporate Parenting Committee raising their concern about the lack of dental provision for Children in Care and Care Leaving Young People. Foster Carers were reminded to raise any concerns about dental appointments with the Looked after Children's Nurse at the initial health assessment which takes place when children first become looked after and at review health assessments, which take place annually. Myra will also investigate how feedback is provided to Foster Carers regarding the outcome of the SDQ, the language used in questionnaires and confirms that health colleagues are looking at providing training to Foster Carers at support groups.
- 2.8 Foster Carers have raised that they are experiencing delays with receiving passports for Children in Care and requested clarity on why these delays were happening. Foster Carers

would like to do what they can to support the children's teams with this as well as obtaining Global Health Insurance Cards for the children they care for. Foster Carers asked for guidance and a standard process to be shared with them.

- 2.9 The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting confirms that the process is being reviewed and will include Foster Carers taking the lead on passport applications with the child's Social Worker remaining responsible for locating essential information such as birth certificates. Practice guidance is in development which will also include how Foster Carers are to be reimbursed for any costs they have paid to ensure that this is also done without delay. The practice guidance will be across all the children's teams who work with Children in Care and that this will be shared with Foster Carers shortly.
- 2.10 Some Foster Carers have reported experiencing issues with transport, particularly at the start of the academic year, it is unclear as to whether these have been booking or resource issues. Foster Carers are keen to provide their support where it would be helpful.
- 2.11 Foster Carers are advised to raise any issues directly with their Fostering Social Worker and the child's Social Worker who will discuss them with the Transport Team. The service has raised Foster Carer feedback with the Transport Team who recognise that driver shortages are impacting on service delivery and the Transport Team is working with the Independent Visitor Service to hopefully recruit more volunteer drivers.
- 2.12 Further improvements are expected with new Transport Software, which is currently at procurement stages. This project will select and implement a new system to replace the current systems used by both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough transport teams. This will improve the communication between the Council, school, Foster Carer, Social Worker, and driver and is planned to be place later this year. The new system is expected to:
- Offer an online portal for social workers to apply for transport
 - Give real-time updates and communication through integrated apps
 - Allow better monitoring of the fulfilment of statutory obligations
 - Promote greener solutions by scheduling the most efficient route plan
 - Improve management information
- 2.13 Foster Carers have noted that the Additional Allowance Consultation is not yet complete and that the consultation response from the Assistant Director, Ricky Cooper, is outstanding.
- 2.14 The Service apologises for the delay and thanked Foster Carers for their patience and understanding. It was confirmed that delays have been necessary to ensure the best offer to Foster Carers across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire is achieved. The consultation response is to be completed in the second week of March which will draw the Additional Allowance Consultation to a close.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

- 3.1 A good quality of life for everyone
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live
There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children

The entire report is aligned with this priority as the Fostering Service is responsible for delivering safe, secure and local foster homes for Cambridgeshire's Children in Care

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050
There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 None

5. Source documents

5.2 None