

FOSTERING SERVICE UPDATE

To: **Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee**

Meeting Date: **20 November 2019**

From: **John Heron
Consultant Lead Manager - Fostering**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Purpose: **To provide the Sub-Committee with an update on the work of the Fostering Service.**

Recommendation: **The Sub-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 due to abuse or neglect. Under section 22G of the Children Act 1989 Local Authorities have a duty to ensure that there are sufficient placements for children who need to be Looked After. For most children and young people, being brought up in the context of a caring and nurturing family where their interests and education is promoted will improve their life chances and future prospects.

In 2018 Cambridgeshire County Council agreed to invest additional monies through transformation funding in order to increase the number of in-house foster carers and to ensure that there is sufficient staffing to support them.

This report provides an update on the work of the Fostering Service and efforts to recruit new in-house foster carers so far in 2019.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 In 2018 Cambridgeshire County Council General Purposes Committee (GPC) agreed to make additional funding available to the fostering service through the Transformation Fund over a three year period in order to meet demand for in-house fostering services.

1.2 The GPC agreed Transformation Funding as follows:

• Up-front marketing investment through three years tender up to	£225,000
• Additional Capacity – Marketing	£80,000
• Staffing Capacity – Recruitment, Support and Business Support	£210,000
• Marketing – direct Campaign Costs	£20,000
• Other Recruitment Incentives including refer a friend scheme	£70,000
• Additional funds to improve support for foster carers.	<u>£100,000</u>
TOTAL:	£705,000

1.3 This report provides information regarding recruitment activity and work of the fostering service so far in the year 2019/2020.

2. MAIN ISSUES

2.1 During the year 2018/2019 the fostering service used the investment money to rebrand the service and undertake a major recruitment campaign in order to ensure visibility of Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Service's position in the fostering market place.

- 2.2 Between April and September 2019 the fostering service has planned and executed a number of recruitment campaigns which build upon the work undertaken in the previous financial year.
- 2.2 A consolidation campaign was run in April 2019 which made use of re-edited and subtitled versions of existing films and materials to reinforce key messages. This was supported by Facebook and online advertising on the Heart FM website (Homepage Takeover). In addition, a radio advert was designed and used from the middle of April, throughout May and into the first week of June.
- 2.3 Cambridgeshire supported the Fostering Fortnight Campaign throughout June 2019 with a series of films on social media, radio advertising with Heart FM and the Grafton Centre advertising campaign.
- 2.4 In July 2019 a new campaign was launched to attract new carers for the Link Scheme. A range of different tactics and strategies were used to do this including three information events held throughout July and August at the Serpentine Shopping Centre in Hampton, videos of Link Carers and birth parents talking about the Link service which were placed Facebook and Twitter and a widely circulated podcast on social media and other social media posts designed to drive prospective carers to the website.
- 2.5 Alongside the general campaign running throughout August, the 'Fostering Career' campaign was planned and launched in September. This campaign encouraged people to consider fostering as a career option.

Marketing and Recruitment activity

- 2.6 In conjunction with the Corporate Communications Department, the fostering service has undertaken a range of activities to plan and execute each campaign. These activities include the following;
- **Acorn data** – Using this data a new foster carer profile has been produced. Analysis of this data provides information about which demographic groups are most likely to foster, where they live and how best to target advertising towards them.
 - **Campaign Partners** – A number of local companies and organisations have been recruited to become 'Campaign Partners'. These organisations 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. Campaign partners include organisations such as Cambridge United Football Club, Peterborough United Football Club, Heart FM, Stagecoach buses, Archant newspapers, BBC Look East, Cambridgeshire Police and Fire services and Network Rail. Each Campaign Partner is sent the campaign videos, imagery and copy for display across all of their channels prior to the campaign launch.

- **Videos** – Videos relevant to each campaign featuring Cambridgeshire Foster Carers have been produced for use on social media.
- **Facebook/Twitter** – Lead generation adverts were created to push the information sessions during the campaigns.
- **Articles Produced for School Newsletters, Libraries and Parishes**– Articles have been produced for publication in school newsletters and circulated to school offices (maintained and academies) as well as to other teachers and governors, libraries and Parishes across the county.
- **BBC** – Wherever possible, interviews have been arranged with BBC Look East radio and BBC Look East television. These have been conducted with Members, foster carers and staff.
- **Grafton Centre advertising** – The digital screen at the Grafton Centre showed our material to coincide with campaigns.
- **Press releases and articles** have been produced regarding the need for foster carers and dispelling myths about fostering.
- **Emails** - Members email has been sent to disseminate the copy and messages across the county.
- **Friday Focus** –Articles have been submitted and disseminated to all social Care staff in Cambridgeshire County Council through the Friday Focus email.

2.7 In addition to the above:

- **Questionnaire** – Questionnaires were disseminated to people who have previously enquired but had not replied to follow up contacts. These will be analysed to inform future marketing and recruitment activities.
- **Foster Carer Newsletter** - the new Foster Carers Newsletter has been well received by foster carers. This is evidenced by the high open and click through rates and positive feedback to social workers. The aim of the newsletter is to help inspire, educate, inform and engage, ultimately retaining existing foster carers and encouraging foster carers to recruit their friends.
- **Refer a Friend** – A new refer a friend scheme has been devised and was launched in October 2019 to encourage existing foster carers and staff to recommend a friend to become a foster carer. A carer or staff member who recommends a friend who is ultimately approved as a foster carer for Cambridgeshire County Council will receive High Street Vouchers to the value of £300. This will be funded from the Transformation Fund.

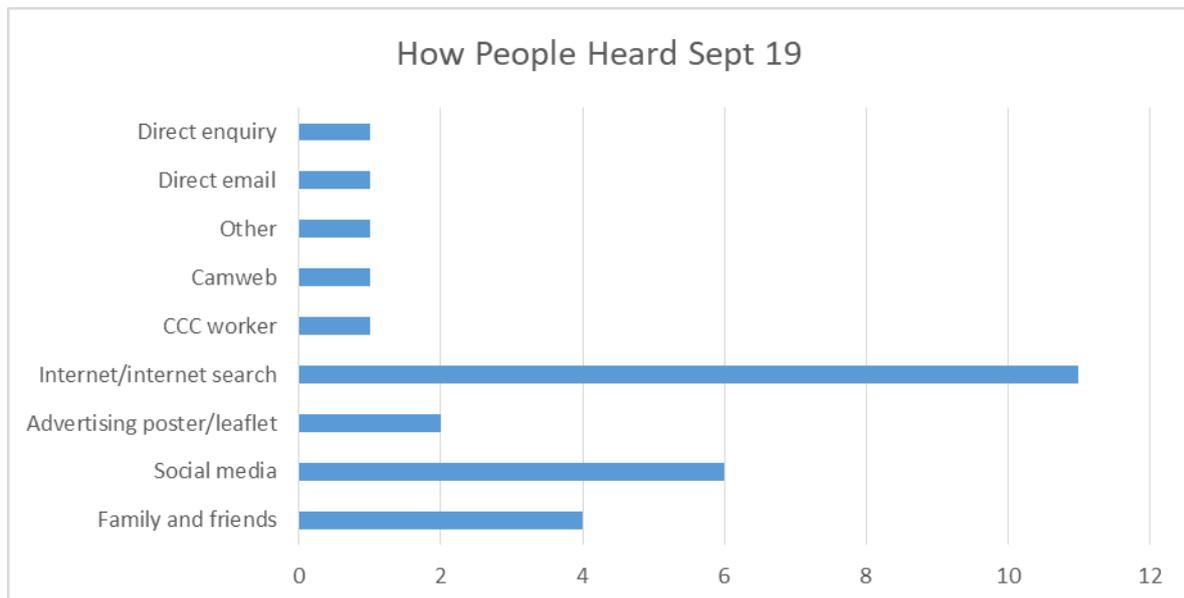
Outcome of the July Link campaign

2.8 The campaign resulted in 17 enquiries. Six enquiries resulted from information events and eleven came through Facebook. Of these:

- Two households received initial visits. One has applied and is now in assessment. The other is not quite ready to apply, but wishes to do so in the near future
- One household was referred on to Peterborough due to location
- Nine households are either not suitable or have decided not to proceed
- Four households requested a call back in late August/ September and two of these have since decided not to proceed. The other two are still considering their options.
- Three have not responded to follow up contact, but attempts are still being made.

Outcome of the September 2019 Fostering Career Campaign

2.9 Twenty eight enquiries were received in September. One application was received in September and the Fostering Recruitment Assessment Team (FRAT) is still following up on the other enquiries. Information on how people were engaged is shown below.



Recruitment Performance to 30th September 2019

2.10 The recruitment and marketing activity discussed above has yielded good results. While it is disappointing that the number of enquires received is actually lower than the number received in the same period last year, (171 in 2019 compared to 224 last year - 24% less) the number of prospective fostering households in assessment, is significantly higher. (It is also interesting to note that many other Local Authorities are reporting a decrease in the number of people enquiring about fostering).

- 2.11 At the end of September 2019, 22 families were in assessment compared to just 13 in 2018, an increase of 69%. This can be attributed to a number of factors which include smarter and more targeted marketing (use of Acorn etc) and work undertaken within the fostering recruitment team regarding initial visits and conversions. This will be further supported by a new Fostering Recruitment Assessment and Training Team Manager who has just arrived in post.
- 2.12 Eleven new fostering households have been approved in the first six months of the year offering an optimum of 15 new fostering beds.

Profile of children

- 2.13 The number of children in care has been rising on a national level since 2008. This has also been true in Cambridgeshire. However, the number of Children in Care in Cambridgeshire has begun to fall since the summer of 2019. At its peak during the school holidays in August 2019 the number of children in care had fallen from 791 to 769 at the end of September.
- 2.14 At the end of Quarter 2 the fostering service was providing care for 272 children.
- Time limited placements: 117
 - Matched placements: 66
 - Unaccompanied children: 3
 - Connected persons (Reg 27): 25
 - Connected Persons (Reg 24): 14
 - Staying Put: 11
 - Supported Lodgings: 10
 - Link: 26

Profile of Foster Carers

- 2.15 At the end of September 2019, the total number of households providing care for children was 203. This includes Short-term, Long-term, Respite, Supported Lodgings, Link and Connected Person's. This is an increase of six households over Quarter 1.
- 2.16 Approved foster carers;
- Short Term, Long Term and Respite - 142 (providing an optimum of 276 beds)
 - Reg 24 – 12
 - Connected persons Reg 27 - 23
 - Supported Lodgings – 12
 - Link carers - 14
- 2.17 Actual Utilisation: 1.3 placements per household.

Carers on Hold

- 2.18 At any one time a number of foster carers will be 'on hold'. This can be for a number of reasons for example some foster carers will be on hold at their own request due to health or their own family commitments. On other occasions foster carers may be placed on hold by the service due to concerns relating to standards of care or allegation enquiries.
- 2.19 On the 30th September 21 households, or 33 beds were 'on hold'. Of these, six households have primary vacancies, that is do not have any other foster children living with them. Between these households, they have 10 beds on hold.
- 2.20 15 households have a total of 23 secondary vacancies. These foster carers are approved for more than one child and the second or third vacancy is on hold. The majority of these are vacant due to having to match the right child needing care with the children or children already living with the foster carer.
- 2.21 The fostering service closely monitors carers on hold and works hard with these carers to maximise utilisation of all care arrangements. The service is currently working with three standards of care concerns.

Foster Cares Leaving Cambridgeshire

- 2.22 Each year fostering services can expect to lose a number of foster carers, the average being 10%. Unfortunately, in the same period five households have resigned from Cambridgeshire. Although this is disappointing, the service anticipates that only a further three households will resign from foster caring in this financial year. This will be below the national average.
- 2.23 Of the five households that have resigned so far this year:
- One has not accepted a placement since 2016. They have been undertaking building work which is still not nearing completion
 - One was approved in 2018 but has never accepted a child into their home
 - One foster carer has moved out of Cambridgeshire and back to be with their extended family
 - One fostering couple resigned to concentrate on their marriage
 - One foster carer resigned following unsubstantiated safeguarding concern
- 2.24 Of the three that the service anticipates will resign this year:
- One is being taken back to fostering panel following safeguarding concerns
 - One is considering retirement due to age
 - One is caring for a family member injured in an accident but may return
- 2.25 No Cambridgeshire foster carers left to join an independent fostering agency.

Pipeline

- 2.26 In addition to the 11 households already approved an additional 22 households are in assessment representing a potential of a further 34

fostering beds for children. Of these, seven households have expressed an interest in fostering teenagers. Together these households would provide an optimum of 15 beds for teenagers.

- 2.27 It is anticipated that the fostering service will have approved 33 households by the end of this financial year providing an optimum of 49 beds.

Planned Activity for Quarter 3 and Quarter 4

- 2.28 The 'Fostering Career' campaign will continue to run throughout October 2019 and into November and planning is underway for the December 'Wishes' campaign which will be a festive message focused on encouraging enquiries over the Christmas period. In January 2020 we will be working with schools and colleges on a 'New Year New You' campaign.

- 2.29 Other planned activity includes:

- Refer a friend incentives will be rolled out throughout October and November.
- The Virtual School in conjunction with the Fostering Service is hosting a conference for foster carers to inform them of new processes. Sir John Timpson will be the key note speaker at the conference.
- This year's Harry Potter Foster Carers Awards event will take place on 8th November 2019. It is expected that around 180 people will attend this event.
- A recruitment and information stand has been booked for the Parish Council Conference and a fostering feature has been sent out to all parishes and councillors for circulation.
- Cambridgeshire will be represented at the marketing forum with Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Essex and Suffolk Local Authorities.

Other Work

Long-term Fostering.

- 2.30 It is the aim of Cambridgeshire Country Council's Corporate Parenting Service to provide stability, a sense of belonging and a better sense of normal family life for those children in our care whose plan is to remain living with their Long-Term Foster Carers.
- 2.31 Within the last year the Fostering Service has been through a significant reorganisation. This reorganisation has brought the 'Family Finding' function together with the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team (FRAT) creating a more streamlined approach to matching and ensuring that recruitment and assessment of carers is informed by knowledge and understanding of the needs of the children in our care and for whom we are hoping to secure permanence.
- 2.32 This approach has resulted in strengthening working relationships, increasing knowledge of the different functions within fostering and ensuring all professionals within the service understand and take responsibility for securing permanence within the remit of their individual roles.

- 2.33 The Family Finding function within the Fostering Service is predominantly undertaken by a team of 4 Family Finding Social Workers (3 x Full Time Equivalents) who are responsible for searching, identifying and matching foster carers and placements which fully meet the needs of children who require Long Term Fostering. The search will include giving consideration to the child/young person's needs and how best these can be met including managing risk and keeping children safe.
- 2.34 The Family Finding Social Workers lead and coordinate the matching process holding six weekly Long Term Planning Meetings (LTPM's) together with the child's/young person's social worker, the fostering social worker, the child (if appropriate), the foster carer and any other professional as required. This meeting takes into account the views of all relevant parties including the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The LTPM's are held regularly and until the match between child and carer is clear at which point a Matching Meeting is held.
- 2.35 Prior to the restructure of the Fostering Service all proposed matching considerations were presented to Foster Panel for recommendation of approval. This process was identified as being overly bureaucratic and potentially causing delay in implementing the child's care plan for permanence. This task has now been removed from core Panel business and is quality assured by the Team Manager, Service Manager and then presented to Decision Maker (in Cambridgeshire this is delegated to the Lead Corporate Parenting Manager) for consideration and approval. The reasons for these changes were informed by the Care planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015.
- 2.36 At the beginning of April 2019 Family Finders were working with 110 children who had a plan for permanent fostering. Since this time Family Finding have matched 51 children, and are actively family finding for 89 children. An additional 36 children had care plans for long-term fostering but these children were not yet ready to be matched.

Placement Stability

- 2.37 As stated above, it is important that children in care are afforded stability, security and a true sense of belonging if they are to grow up reaching their full potential. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is through high quality support to children and their foster carers. It is crucial to avoid placement disruptions and the subsequent moves for children. The experience of this can have lasting and devastating consequences for children and young people. If the right type of support or intervention can be offered, at the right time and at the right frequency the number of children at risk of placement breakdown could be significantly reduced.
- 2.38 Additionally, by increasing the intensity of provision to existing in-house foster carers during times of placement instability and crisis will encourage carers to persevere, feeling supported and valued as a member of the team around the child. This in turn will increase placement stability and reduce the reliance on

the Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).

- 2.39 The Reunification and Placement Stability Service (RAPS) currently offers placement stability support to children and their foster carers. However, this is limited due to capacity of the service. It is therefore proposed that RAPS and the fostering service work together to extend and develop this offer to introduce a tiered level of available support. In order to achieve this, the RAPS service will require additional staffing. Funding for this will be identified from the Transformation Fund in the first instance, however it is anticipated that this work will lead to significant savings in the future.
- 2.40 Achieving placement stability increases positive outcomes for children and young people across all areas of their lives including education settings, access to health care and being connected to their community. Once achieved a 'step down' to less intensive care or reunification can be considered. This offer alongside existing support to carers will increase both resilience and retention of foster carers.

3. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Resource Implications

The Transformation Funding is being used to fund a wide range of fostering carer recruitment and retention activity. It is also proposed that it should be used

3.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

N/A

3.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

Under section 22G of the Children Act 1989 Local Authorities have a duty to ensure that there is a sufficient quantity, range and choice placements to meet the needs of all children who need to be cared for by the Local Authority.

3.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

As above.

3.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

The fostering service is working closely with Corporate Communications in order to engage with the public and to recruit and retain foster carers.

3.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Members are asked to support recruitment and retention activities where possible

3.7 Public Health Implications

Source Documents	Location
None	