

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE (FORMAL)	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
16 MARCH 2022	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of: Charlotte Black	Charlotte Black, Interim Executive Director, People and Communities, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Fiona Van Den Hout, Head of Service Fostering and Supervised Contact	Tel. 01223 518739

REPORT FROM THE FOSTER CARER COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Fiona Van Den Hout	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes the content of this report • Raise any queries they have with the lead officers 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Committee

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform committee of activity undertaken by the Foster Carer Committee and to update on fostering service developments and in response to the Foster Carer Survey.

2.2 This report is for the Corporate Parenting Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 2.4.4.6 To monitor the quality of care delivered by the City Council and review the performance of outcomes for children and young people in care.

(e) Monitor the ongoing commitment to providing support, training and clarity of expectations to foster carers to achieve excellent and high quality care.

2.3 This reports to the Children in Care Pledge by focussing on respect for children in care and care leavers

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.0 Overview

This report has been prepared to update the Corporate Parenting Committee on participation activity with Peterborough Foster Carers, and to provide an overview of development activity within the service.

4.1 The Peterborough Foster Carer Committee (PFCC) Annual General Meeting took place on 03 December 2021, where Foster Carers elected the following representatives into the following roles:

Mandy Nicholson, Chair of the Peterborough Foster Carer Committee, Glen Crossland, Vice Chair, Sue Stepney, Secretary, Lynne Bailey Treasurer, Andrea Hughes Events Lead.

4.2 Committee members have a wealth of fostering experience between them, and the service is looking forward to working closely with the Committee over the coming year to ensure the voice and views of Peterborough Foster Carers is central to plans for service development.

4.3 The PFCC held its first meeting of the new Committee on 21 January 2022. The following matters were raised:

- 1) Some Foster Carers have reported experiencing issues with transport, particularly instances where taxis have not been provided for children's appointments, it is unclear as to whether these have been booking or resource issues. Foster Carers has been advised to raise any issues directly with the Fostering Team Manager, who will discuss them with the child's Social Worker and/or with the Transport Department. A review of all transport arrangements for Children in Care is currently underway and the Fostering Team Manager is working closely with the Transport Team to resolve issues. It is recognised that driver shortages are impacting on service delivery, the Transport Team is working with the Independent Visitor Service to hopefully recruit more Volunteer drivers.

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 CCC and PCC transport teams. 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

This will improve the communication between the council, school, foster carer/ social worker, and driver. We hope to be able to start using the new system later this year.

- 2) The Committee noted that Sue Stepney and Fiona Van Den Hout had met to discuss the Junior ISA and Trust Fund accounts to talk about savings for Children in Care. Future meetings have been scheduled to discuss further.

Unfortunately, due to staff absence it has not been possible to progress this activity and Elected Members will receive an updated in the next Corporate Parenting Committee report.

- 3) Foster Carers raised that the Additional Allowance Consultation is not yet complete and that the consultation response from the Assistant Director, Ricky Cooper, is outstanding.

The service apologised 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 mid-March which will draw the Additional Allowance Consultation to a close.

- 4) Foster Carers said that the new Accreditation Competency Guide and associated skills level payments was welcomed and clear.
- 5) Foster Carers asked about the service's plans to celebrate long standing carers and this year's Foster Carer's Award event.

The service confirmed that every month, carers who have reached a milestone in their fostering carer will be noted and celebrated in the Newsletter (with their consent) and an Awards ceremony will be held in the Autumn. The Children in Care Council has asked to be involved in the nomination categories this year, which has been welcomed by the service. It was also agreed that whilst some of our carers have recently joined the Council if they have fostered for a significant period beforehand, their fostering career can also be celebrated at this event in recognition of their commitment to Children in Care. Foster Carers also heard that the Chairs of both the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Committee/Association have been invited to review and agree the events calendar for this year with the service.

- 6) Foster Carers expressed some concerns about the Stepping Out booklet which they said has received mixed responses from the young people they care for. Foster Carers suggested having the booklet on an app would be more user-friendly and that it was helpful to include some key independence skills such as learning to read a meter or mending a puncture on a bike.

The service confirmed that other external providers such as children's homes as well as Foster Carers from independent agencies are also required to complete the Stepping Out booklet with young people in their care. It is important that the Council makes sure they are supporting young people to develop their independence skills so that they are ready to move into their own accommodation when the time is right for them. The Stepping Out booklet was produced together with Young People in care and those who have left care, but feedback from Foster Carers will be taken on board. The Head of Corporate Parenting, Myra O'Farrell, is also keen to attend part of the Committee meetings on a regular basis to hear

feedback from carers on subjects directly related to children and young people and care planning.

- 7) Foster Carers raised that their experience of the most recent vaccination programme for children and young people has felt 'messy' and Foster Carers shared that the service at 'walk in' centres had run more smoothly.

The service has informed the project group overseeing the 5 to 11-year-old vaccination programme (which includes colleagues from Public Health) that Foster Carers need clear information and guidance regarding the permissions needed for children in their care, and that they require reassurance that this programme will run smoothly for the children they care for. The project group noted Foster Carers views and said that they will ensure communications are clear to both carers and schools.

- 8) Foster Carers asked if the Vivacity Gym membership includes swimming lessons as well as use of the gym and that other free resources and events be included in Newsletter such as the Park Run.

The service confirms that Foster Carers and those living in their household can enjoy free gym and swim membership as Children in Care they are able to access swimming lessons.

- 9) Foster Carers raised that it was important for the service to ensure that both prospective and approved carers understand about the need to put in pension arrangements as they are considered self-employed.

The service is currently reviewing the pre-approval and first-year training programme for this coming year. Following feedback from Foster Carers, the service will be delivering a different preparation training programme to applicant Foster Carers called 'Journey 2 Foster' starting in the summer. The 'Journey 2 Foster' programme is very thorough and provides a lot of useful information to applicants. The service agreed to ensure that workshops on tax and pensions will be prioritised in the Next Steps training programme which is targeted at approved Foster Carers in their first year of fostering but can be joined by all Foster Carers. Details of these workshops will be included in the 2022 - 2023 Training Programme.

- 10) The Foster Carer Committee confirmed that it is developing the Facebook site for Peterborough Foster Carers and discussed how this would be monitored and run. Foster Carers said that they had found the previous Facebook site to be a valuable source of support and information.

The service offered to support the development of the site if this is needed. The service will be holding a Transformation Launch event in April with staff and carers, which will be a good opportunity to showcase the new branding and our unified identity as a Fostering Service and Community across both Local Authorities.

- 11) Foster Carers raised that the Government has provided a £500 grant which has been given to schools for every Child in Care. It was understood that the grant

was to pay for *enrichment activities to aid their wellbeing*. Foster Carers requested clarification as to how and who was making the decisions about how the grant was spent.

The service has asked for clarification from the Virtual School Head in Cambridgeshire, Claire Hiorns, who confirmed that this is a recovery premium and information regarding this can be found on the government website (www.gov.uk). The grant is £145 for children in mainstream education and £290 for children in specialist education settings. As with the Pupil Premium, funding for Children in Care is managed by the Local Authority Virtual School Head who works with schools to decide how to use the funding effectively to support Children in Care. The funding is allocated through the PEP, and this can be raised by Foster Carers at the child's PEP meeting.

- 12) Foster Carers noted that the current arrangements for using Sand Martin House for NHS appointments and letters is causing unnecessary delay and it was agreed that Foster Carers will raise this with the child's Social Worker.
- 13) It was noted that the service has successfully engaged Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors from within the Fostering Community, and there are two roles within Peterborough. The role of the Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors is to work in partnership with the service by:
 - Supporting the Fostering Service to increase marketing and recruitment activity across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough,
 - Working with us to develop our recruitment campaigns and marketing material,
 - Undertaking initial visits with fostering staff to prospective foster carers,
 - Attending Information Sessions with Recruitment Officers,
 - Linking with local communities and faith groups to identify opportunities to increase the awareness of fostering as a career,
 - Working with us to encourage businesses, district councils and other Council departments to offer our carers discounts and concessionary memberships,
 - Representing the Fostering Service at strategic meetings and events including meetings with partners and stakeholders,
 - Engaging with the wider Fostering Community to provide ideas and initiatives focussed on recruitment.
- 14) Foster Carers asked for a copy of the service structure chart and more information about the shared service, including the role of Mentors and how they are supported by the service.

The service will be including a structure chart within the new Foster Carer Handbook which will be published to carers in April alongside the revised Foster Carer Agreements. The service also confirms that the Mentorship programme is currently under review and new framework will be discussed shortly with both Foster Carer Committee/Association Chairs in both Councils. The Head of Service meets monthly with the Chairs which provides a good opportunity for planned development work to be discussed.

- 15) Foster Carers heard that the 0-5 Baby Support Group is running and is open to all carers. The service is currently reviewing the support group offer in PCC.
- 16) Foster Carers heard that for a recent Foster Carer Annual Review, the Household Reviewing Officer attended the Foster Carer's home and that this was a positive experience. Expectations around the Foster Carer Annual Review were outlined, noting that an additional review process had been introduced recently to support the completion of any outstanding Annual Reviews by the end of January 2022. This has been achieved and going forward the expectation is that the Household Reviewing Officers will be visiting carers in person.

At the last 'Coffee and Cake' informal meeting with the AD and members of the senior management team held in February, Foster Carers raised the following:

- Foster Carers requested that the service does more to raise awareness of the Foster Carer Association and Committee. The service is working with both Chairs and has identified opportunities to support this. The service is committed to supporting the awareness of the Foster Carer Committee and Association within the wider Fostering Community.
- A request was made to review the Foster Carer Agreements. This is underway and a revised agreement will be sent to 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 will discuss this further with the Virtual School Heads.
- Foster Carers raised that the paperwork they are asked to complete can be onerous and time-consuming. The service recognises this and is reviewing all paperwork, including the TSD workbook, to ensure that it is as streamlined as possible. Decreasing the amount of paperwork Foster Carers are asked to complete 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.

5 CONSULTATION

5.1 N/A

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

6.1 Foster carer views will feed into the key priorities of the service

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Corporate Parenting Committee members have a duty to review the performance of Children's Social Care.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 N/A

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

9.2 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Equalities Implications

9.3 There are no equalities implications associated with this report

Children in Care Implications

9.4 This report relates to the services provided for children in care and care leavers and ties into the Pledge and Charter that the local authority respects the differing wants and needs for all.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 N/A

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