

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE (FORMAL)	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
24 NOVEMBER 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of: Wendi Ogle-Welbourn	Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, 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

4.1 Overview

The Peterborough Foster Carer Committee (PFCC) met on 17 September 2021 and was also joined by Kevin Arrowsmith, the Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association. The Head of Service, Fiona Van Den Hout, met with the PFCC Vice Chair Mandy Nicholson and the Secretary, Sue Stepney, on 2 November 2021 to review the discussions and action points raised at the meeting.

The Corporate Parenting Committee is also asked to note the resignation of the Chair of the PFCC, Stephen Greene, which was given on the 21 October 2021. The service would like to formally express its gratitude to Mr Greene for the commitment and dedication he has shown to the fostering community in Peterborough during his term as Chair and to the Vice Chair for providing her support to the service during this interim period. The PFCC will be holding its Annual General Meeting on 3 December 2021 where the election of committee officers will take place.

The service has reviewed and collated the themes from the Foster Carer Survey conducted in June and monthly meetings are taking place between the service leads and Chairs of the PFCC and Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association where the themes will be discussed alongside other key initiatives and service developments.

4.2 Peterborough Foster Carer Committee meeting, 17 September 2021:

- 1) The committee welcomed Shalina Chandoo and Marya Ali, children's participation leads who provided a presentation on the Children in Care Council and the Children in Care participation group.

The following points were raised:

- The Committee asked how children and young people in care were informed of the opportunities provided to them. Whilst it was explained that information was provided when a child first comes into care, the Committee felt that for some children it may not be the right time to provide lots of information and it would be better to do this following a period of settling in and adjusting to being in care. The Committee suggestion this could be after six months and the service is pleased to report that this has been actioned at the suggestion of the PFCC.
 - The Chair asked if there as a buddy system in place for children in care and were told that there is no formal system for this but if a child or young person would benefit from 1 to 1 support from another young person this could be arranged.
 - The Committee heard that Peterborough children fostered outside of Peterborough are supported by the participation service. A Committee member asked if children and young people who live in Peterborough and are fostered though other local authorities could attend, it was confirmed this was not currently possible but would be considered.
- 2) The Chair provided an overview of the recently conducted Foster Carer Survey, a key finding being that social workers are under a lot of pressure and Foster Carers and children are experiencing some changes in their Social Worker which makes it difficult to build working relationships.

The service acknowledges that there has been some instability within the team that supports Peterborough Foster Carers earlier this year. The service is pleased to report that the team has recently welcomed a new permanent Social Worker and a new interim Social Worker who is covering maternity leave and is now fully staffed. The service is

also pleased to report that it has had some success with Social Work recruitment and crucially the function that supervises and supports Foster Carers is now fully staffed. Recruitment to the remaining vacant posts elsewhere in the fostering service is a priority however, the service is experiencing the same challenges in Social Worker recruitment as the wider system is experiencing and it is slower than hoped. The fostering service will ensure any cover arrangements are communicated in a timely way to Foster Carers.

- 3) The committee discussed care experienced young adults over the age of 18 who are living with Foster Carers under a Staying Put arrangement. The committee raised that Foster Carers would like more information about the young person's plan and to improve communication with the young person's Personal Advisor. The Committee also had a number of questions in regard to support provided to young adults in Staying Put arrangements and the service agreed to introduce the PFCC to the new Lead Service Manager for Leaving Care, Lisa Spencer, so that the Committee can invite her to a meeting in the future.
- 4) The Committee raised that when a Social Worker leaves the fostering service or Peterborough Council, they should be asked about what was good about their job and what was difficult, so that the Council could learn from feedback. The Committee was concerned that Foster Carers who feel unsupported may choose to transfer to an independent fostering agency. The Committee also noted that experienced Foster Carers have acted as Mentors to new Foster Carers who have had challenging experiences caring for children. The Committee suggested they could reach out to Foster Carers with an offer of support and the Foster Carers Handbook could provide more information about the PFCC to new Foster Carers.

The service requested that the PFCC review the information provided about the Committee to new carers and would welcome inclusion of this within the new Foster Carer Handbook that will be launched shortly. The service also confirmed that whilst no Peterborough fostering households have transferred last year or so far this year to an independent agency, there is a need to build a stronger support offer for our carers which was also raised in the Foster Carer Survey and is an area of focus for the service.

The service will do this by:

- Focussing on the support offer to Foster Carers alongside the Children's Social Work Teams, for example the Stability Meeting process to support care arrangements when they are fragile has been reviewed by colleagues in Corporate Parenting so that the right support approach across the wider system is offered at the right time to carers.
- Routinely investigating the circumstances behind care arrangements that end in an unplanned and often distressing way for children, to ensure that learning feeds into supervisions with staff and with fostering households.
- Working to resolve carer dissatisfaction as soon as it arises and the service has introduced a clear process for Supervising Social Worker's to support escalation of any concerns that Foster Carers may have with their line manager and, if necessary, the Service Manager for the Support and Supervision function will also provide support to resolve.
- Monitoring all feedback, positive and negative, and the service has introduced an exit interview process for when Foster Carers notify the service of their decision to resign. This will ensure lessons are learned within the service. A quarterly service newsletter has also been introduced which will highlight

learning from service audit activity as part of the Fostering Audit Programme introduced in September. The service confirmed that Peterborough City Council does offer exit interviews to all staff who are leaving.

- Reviewing all Support Group arrangements held in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough over the coming months to ensure they are purposeful, informative, and supportive. A number of Foster Carers have said that they would be willing to share their experiences of fostering at Support Groups to provide advice but also to improve the confidence of carers. Progress in regard to this review will be discussed at the monthly meetings with service leads and Chairs.
 - Improving the support to Foster Carers subject to allegations. All Foster Carers who are subject to allegations are offered independent advocacy and advice through Foster Talk. However, in acknowledging that this process can be isolating and distressing, the service is also exploring with the PFFC and Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association how the emotional health and well-being of Foster Carers can be better supported. Whilst ensuring the timely conclusion of the allegation process is a priority for the service, the service also considers that during this time Foster Carers would benefit from a more formal support offer from Foster Carer Mentors, and this will be included within the revised Mentorship Framework which the service will launch in November.
 - Reviewing the out of hours support line arrangements for Foster Carers, which is predominantly provided by Supervising Social Workers. The service has received feedback from Foster Carers as to how valuable they have found this resource which is in addition to the Council's Emergency Duty Team (also available to Foster Carers) which operates after office hours, seven days a week. The service's strategic direction is to have a combined support line offer across both Councils which is responsive and also sustainable for the service.
- 5) The Committee noted that some Foster Carers continue to experience challenges with setting up savings accounts for the children they are looking after. The service confirmed that the saving and pocket money policy review is in progress and a meeting with the Liaison Officer for the Junior ISA and Child Trust Funds Accounts has been arranged week commencing 15 November 2021.
- 6) The Committee noted that there needs to be clear financial information for Foster Carers in relation to the Foster Fees paid in both Councils and additional allowances paid to Foster Carers, such as mileage and expectations around pocket money and savings. The Committee also requested clarification on how Foster Carers progress through the Accreditation Levels (skills level matrix). The service confirmed that Fostering Fees were aligned across both Councils in September 2020 and the consultation on additional payments to Foster Carers has been launched. The consultation process will conclude in December 2021. In addition, the Accreditation Framework has been revised and will be shared with Foster carers shortly.
- 7) The Committee requested confirmation that the service was acknowledging the commitment and dedication of Foster Carers who have provided care for Peterborough children for substantial periods of time. The service confirmed that it has acknowledged two fostering households this month who between them have cared for children for seventy years. Both carers received a visit from the Assistant Director, Ricky Cooper, and they were presented with an engraved vase as a gesture of the Council's appreciation.

<p>Foster Carers would like more specialised training for carers looking after children with disabilities and complex health needs</p> <p>Foster Carers would like specific training to support them with managing challenging behaviours and more in-depth training that focuses on practices and tools to change carers parenting approach. Foster Carers would also like more training targeted at looking after older children and teenagers which is co delivered alongside carers who already care for this age range and training that focusses more on practical skills and theory-based practices</p> <p>Foster Carers want us to provide more training that is face to face rather than e learning/virtual and a mixture of courses that are run during the week when children are at school, in the evenings and at weekends</p> <p>Foster Carers value experienced foster carers attending training to share their experiences and positive examples so others can learn</p> <p>Foster carers would like care experienced young people to be involved in training sessions with new and existing carers</p> <p>Foster carers told us that the TSDS document is too onerous and asked us to explore whether there are better ways of supporting carers to complete it</p>	<p>The service is developing this offer with colleagues in the 0-25 service and a Foster Carer from Peterborough has offered to co facilitate training. This year the service has also commissioned 'Think Autism' training which is a combination of training and discussion groups. Where needed, specialist training is arranged with the relevant health professionals for a specific child.</p> <p>The service is working alongside commissioning and Early Help colleagues to develop a bid to the Youth Endowment Fund aiming to provide an evidenced based Triple P Parenting Programme suited to Foster Carers with the goal of increasing knowledge, skills and confidence and reducing the prevalence of mental health, emotional and behavioural difficulties in children and adolescents. A Positive Behaviour Support training course has run twice so far this year.</p> <p>The service has just delivered its first hybrid Skills to Foster training, which was a mixture of face-to-face training on a Saturday and virtual training in the evenings. The service does recognise the importance of new carers meeting other carers but finding suitably large training venues remains a challenge due to Covid restrictions.</p> <p>The service is hoping to invite experienced carers to co-facilitate the Next Steps workshops, experienced carers already support training courses such as 'Moving Children on to Adoption' and Skills to Foster attendees value learning and talking with the approved foster carers who attend.</p> <p>The Skills to Foster training includes care experienced young people joining for some of the course. The service will continue to explore opportunities with colleagues in the participation team to build on this.</p> <p>Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) are a required set of Standards defined by the Department of Education which mainstream Foster Carers are expected to evidence completion of within a year of being approved. The TSDS workbook is understandably thorough but the service will undertake a review in early 2022 to explore how the workbook can be made more accessible.</p>
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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

Rural Implications

9.4 There are no rural implications associated with this report

Children in Care Implications

9.5 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.

9.6 Carbon Emissions Implications

No impact has been identified.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

10.1 N/A

11. APPENDICES

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