

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
15 MARCH 2023	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of: Elaine Redding	Elaine Redding, Interim Director of Children's Services	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cabinet Member for Childrens Services, Education, Skills and University	
Contact Officer(s):	Ricky Cooper, Assistant Director, Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People's Services	Tel. 01223 699609

UPDATE FROM FOSTER CARERS

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Despina Kaoura, Service Manager, Fostering	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the content of this report 2. Raises any queries they have with the lead officers 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Committee as a regular work programme item.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

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

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, (d) Hold meetings with children and young people in care, frontline staff and Foster Carers to inform the committee of the standards of care and improvement outcomes for looked after children.

2.4 *How does this report link to the Children in care Promise?*

This report links to the Children in Care Promise 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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4.0 **BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

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

The Peterborough Foster Carer Community (PFCC) continue to meet bi-monthly, and the Annual General Meeting took place on 9 December 2022.

Foster Carers representatives on the PFCC are Mandy Nicholson, Chair of the Peterborough Foster Carer Community, Glen Crossland, Vice Chair, Andrea Hughes, Secretary & Events Coordinator, Lynne Bailey, Treasurer.

4.2 **Fostering Working Groups – Progress Briefing**

The Fostering Service strives to develop and improve the service we deliver to Children in Care of the Local Authority (LA) and the Foster Carers who provide this care on behalf of the LA. The Fostering Service recognises the wealth of fostering experience, knowledge and understanding Foster Carers have of children who come into the care system and caring for children within their homes and as part of their families. The Service values the individual inter-personal skills which Carers bring with them to support the Foster Carer Community. The Service works closely with the members of the Peterborough Foster Carer Committee (PFCC) and the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (CFCA) but also with the wider fostering community throughout the year to ensure the voice and views of Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Foster Carers are heard and are central to plans for service development.

4.3 **Retention of Foster Carers**

We are working alongside Foster Carers in the Retention Focus Group to make sure that we respond quickly to any issues raised by Foster Carers that are causing general concern. We meet quickly with any Foster Carers who have expressed that they are considering giving up fostering. By listening and responding to Foster Carers' voices we are demonstrating that we hear and value them and that their views have a positive impact on the fostering service. We have heard from Foster Carers that they appreciate our timely response to the concerns that they raise.

Foster Carers have told us that they find it stressful when they are facing a standards of care concern, and consequently consider giving up fostering. We have responded to their feedback by agreeing shorter timescales for completing the work with them, and to make sure that the situation is resolved as soon as possible.

4.4 **Recruitment Ambassadors**

The Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors from within the Fostering Community continue to work alongside the Service supporting recruitment activity and raising the awareness of fostering in their communities using their wealth of knowledge and experience of the fostering task. We are also supported in this area by our local elected member champion.

Throughout 2022 our Recruitment Ambassadors have represented the Fostering Service at various events across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, including: Peterborough Pride and Christmas light events.

Additionally, they have worked with us to support marketing and recruitment activity by displaying posters, creating videos, participating in radio interviews, and attending virtual information sessions alongside Recruitment Officers. Further to this, the Ambassadors have attended quarterly face to face meetings with the Recruitment Team where they have provided feedback which has aided the development of our information sessions, 'unique selling points,' initial visits and marketing materials.

For 2023, the Recruitment Ambassadors will help to promote the Fostering Service across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire by assisting with the organisation of drop-in sessions and stalls to increase our local presence. A development in the role will be for the Recruitment Ambassadors to look at setting up and running coffee mornings in the geographical area they are responsible for, the purpose being to increase connections between local Foster Carers by allowing them to come together and share ideas and experiences, as well as this being a relaxed environment where prospective Carers can be encouraged to come along and speak with their local Ambassador.

4.5 Mentoring Scheme

The Fostering Service continues to work together with Carers to develop our Mentoring Scheme. Mentors are allocated to and support Carers who might be experiencing a difficult time in their fostering role, for example when they are subject to an allegation or Standards of Care investigation. We have one Foster Carer Mentor who has been trained and supported by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to offer support to Carers. We understand that the impact of this support is particularly helpful to Carers at what can be a very difficult time. We hope to increase this offer to at least two specialist Mentors across the service.

The Service supports experienced and skilled Foster Carers to share their skills and expertise with others across the service. Mentors are matched with and provide support to Carers who are new to the service, in assessment or undertaking a fostering task which may be unfamiliar to them or with any challenges that arise. This is an area we are further developing.

It is acknowledged that the PCC Mentorship Scheme (k/a PCC Buddies) is not as developed as the mentorship scheme in Cambridgeshire, however the scheme now has a dedicated professional lead from within the PCC fostering team to help develop the scheme and the role as well as support Carers in this role. We have 4 PCC Buddies/Mentors in place with 3 more interested in the role alongside 13 Mentors in Cambridgeshire.

We currently hold 3 virtual meetings a year with our Mentors/Buddies to discuss any issues around mentoring and to provide updates regarding the Fostering Service. The fostering social workers who support the Mentors/Buddies also give advice to colleagues regarding which Carers to refer and when to refer for a Mentor/Buddy. We also liaise with fostering staff about Foster Carers who wish to apply to be Mentors and interview them.

We are now in the process of putting a Mentor's Handbook together. We have arranged an in-person meeting (the first since Covid) for all the PCC Buddies and the CCC Mentors at New Shire Hall on 09 February. Before then, the staff will meet to discuss what the new mentoring scheme will look like, and we can then consult the Mentors about our plans at the meeting. The service organised the accredited Mentoring training for Foster Carer Mentors, however feedback was mixed so this will be reviewed to ensure that it meets everybody's needs.

4.6 Fostering Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Focus Group

The Fostering Service has brought together an EDI (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) focus group which involves staff and Carers. There has been one meeting to date to discuss the Children in Care Council request regarding the use of children and young people's pronouns and preferred names. We have developed an EDI statement which we are proposing the Fostering Service adopts. This work is informed by our Foster Carers lived experience of caring for children. The

group has raised requests for changes on the children's database (Liquid Logic) to include gender / pronoun preference on demographics. Our next meeting will consider increasing the diversity of fostering panel members.

4.7 **Feedback Loop**

The feedback loop sets out Foster Carer experiences, views and feedback gathered through the Foster Carer forums in Peterborough (the Peterborough Foster Carer Community: PFCC) and in Cambridgeshire (the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association: CFCA) It reflects Foster Carer voices from across the Fostering Community in relation to a range of topics they have chosen to provide feedback on or areas of specific challenge. For each new feedback theme there is a section for the Corporate Parent response which will be taken back to the Foster Carer forums, providing a transparent and open dialogue between Foster Carers, Children's Services, and the wider Council departments.

The Fostering Service continues to engage with Foster Carers via regular meetings with the Foster Carer Association/Community, Support Groups, the range of working groups discussed above in order to hear feedback directly from Foster Carers on what is working well and what Foster Carers feel needs to be considered or addressed, by the Fostering Service and Children's teams, including how we can best work together to develop, improve and grow the Fostering Service.

5. **CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

5.1 This work links to the Council's Corporate Priority in relation to the following:

Priority Prevention, Independence & Resilience

The Fostering Service ensures every Child gets the best start in life – with more children and young people in care finding permanent, safe and stable homes and support to care leavers to access a good, enhanced local offer that meets their health, education, housing and employment needs.

The Fostering Service ensures that children and young people are safe from harm and lead healthy lives. Children and young people are confident, resilient, thrive in their learning and engage positively and actively in their communities. The Fostering Service supports Care Leavers through the Staying Put Scheme.

Further information on the Council's Priorities can be found here - [Link to Corporate Strategy and Priorities Webpage](#)

6. **CONSULTATION**

6.1 N/A

7. **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT**

7.1 Foster Carer views will feed into the key priorities of the service.

8. **REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

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

9. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 N/A

10. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

10.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

10.2 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Equalities Implications

10.3 There are no equality implications associated with this report.

10.4 Carbon Impact

The report contains no new proposals, and therefore there are no decisions which will have an impact on carbon emissions.

10.5 Impact on Children in Care

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.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

11.1 None

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None

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