

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
19 JULY 2023	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	John Gregg Executive Director Children and Young People's Service	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres Cabinet Member for Education, Skills, and Children's Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Brian Relph, Assistant Director, Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People's Services	Tel. 07885 717462

UPDATE FROM FOSTER CARERS

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Despina Kaoura and Sue King, Service Managers 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 from the Fostering Service.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to keep the Corporate Parenting Committee informed of activity undertaken by the Foster Carer Community together with the Fostering Service 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 This report is to support the Corporate Parenting Committee 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.
- 2.3 *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.

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 and life experience, knowledge and understanding Foster Carers come with. They have a great understanding of children who come into the care system through caring for children within their homes as part of their families. The Service values the individual 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.

An excellent example of development work by the PFCC is a Welcome Pack designed by the PCC Committee to send out to all PCC carers to keep carers informed and provide easy access to Fostering and other relevant policies and procedures and handbooks etc including the most up to date information from the service.

The current working groups we have are:

- Recruitment Ambassador Working Group
- Retention Working Group
- Mentoring Working Group
- Amongst other joint working to meet the needs of the service and the children we care for.

4.3 **Retention of Foster Carers**

We continue to host a monthly Foster Carer Retention Working Group, with Foster Carers working alongside Social Workers, Recruitment Officers and Managers to consider issues related to the retention of Foster Carers. This quarter we have put focus on the 'Cost of Living' crisis and impact this is having on Foster Carers and the retention of applicants in assessment and newly approved Foster Carers. We have also put focus on recruitment activity as part of retention, since the more involved Foster Carers are with the service, the better the retention of the Foster Carers. There has been a range of activity focused on these areas, which include Foster Carers and Staff working with the finance department to rectify issues with the remittance forms, annual statements, and reimbursements for expenses and money owed. The Foster Carer Community awaits the decision of the Local Authority on the increase in Foster Carer Allowances for 2023-2024. Foster Carers choose to foster for a range of reasons, but financial gain is not one of them, however Foster Carers need to receive adequate financial support to meet the needs of the children they care for, and expenses incurred.

Foster Carers have told us that they sometimes find it difficult to discuss money issues or emotional wellbeing matters. We have responded by asking Supervising Social Workers to promote with Foster Carers that we want them to feel able to discuss these matters freely with us and without judgment. We have also written a range of articles within the Fostering newsletter on financial matters and emotional wellbeing to promote this further. Foster Carers also have access to the Employees Assistance Programme the same as staff employed by PCC.

We have expanded on our informal coffee mornings and lunches with Foster Carers leading on this activity, to ensure that new Foster Carers and existing Foster Carers have increased opportunities to socialise with one another, and to share their knowledge and skill. This activity also lessens any risk of Foster Carers feeling isolated within their role.

The Fostering Service together with the PFCC continue to bring together the two Local Authorities through events held throughout the year. There are also a range of working groups, that include both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Foster Carers.

We continue to ensure that for any carer considering leaving the service, we have cultivated a system whereby managers are informed of this immediately. The Foster Carer is visited by a manager and an action plan is drawn up to ensure that any issues are managed in a proactive and timely manner. This approach is working well, with Foster Carers not leaving the service due to being unhappy with the fostering service. In this quarter we have had five fostering households leave the service. One was due to ill health, one retired, two had a significant change in family circumstances and one felt they had too many other commitments and no availability to foster. Overall, the retention activity is going well, with Foster Carers being a core part of this work.

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 currently have three Peterborough Ambassadors and three Cambridgeshire Ambassadors. All of the Ambassadors meet with the Recruitment Team quarterly to review the progress of work undertaken and to consider new ideas.

The Ambassadors are very proactive in researching recruitment opportunities within their local area and they have continued to support with a range of events in their local communities. They have also been working on a new initiative for the summer months, which focuses on picnics in the park. The concept is that picnics will be arranged, and the Foster Carers will be encouraged to bring along their family and friends. This enables the Ambassadors and Recruitment Officers to engage with family and friends in an informal manner and provide information about fostering should they wish to apply. In addition, these picnics are also good for the retention of Foster Carers.

One of the Ambassadors and a Team Manager have started a monthly online Q&A session which is focused on providing fostering applicants and newly approved Foster Carers with the opportunity to come along to the session, ask any questions and learn from others. This session has proved popular, and the feedback has been very good.

To promote the Council's Foster Friendly initiative one of the Ambassadors recently supported with a presentation on 'Peterborough Conversations' and has made a video of her experience of working for the Council, alongside her fostering role, to promote this to other council workers. Other Ambassadors are also very involved with creating case studies and videos for promotional purposes.

The Ambassadors are supporting with creating content for the Foster Carer newsletter. We feel that if the newsletter content is predominately led by Foster Carers, then it will be more engaging to other Foster Carers.

The Ambassadors are also promoting the Fostering Service across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire by assisting with the organisation of drop-in sessions which have a different focus to the established information evenings that we host. Instead, they are being advertised as 'Come and talk to a Foster Carer'. We feel that this type of event will be more appealing to the public, since most people who enquire are most interested in talking to a Foster Carer who is already in this role.

In addition to the Ambassadors, we are also widening our pool of Foster Carers that support generally with Fostering recruitment. There are several monthly meetings with Foster Carers who want to share their recruitment ideas with the Recruitment Team. Recently we ran a competition with Foster Carers to submit their recruitment ideas to be entered into a prize raffle. We had an excellent response to the competition and obtained some really good ideas for recruitment activity.

4.5 Mentoring Scheme

The Fostering Service continues to operate a peer Mentoring Scheme. The Mentors work in a structured one-to-one relationship with a Foster Carer, with the main purpose being to support a Foster Carer to develop their knowledge, experience, skills and build on their confidence within the Fostering role.

Significant progress has been made to ensure that the Peterborough Mentoring Scheme is established, and it now equals that of Cambridgeshire. There has been training undertaken by the Peterborough Mentors, together with a change in payments to bring them in line with their Cambridgeshire peers. There is now a uniform approach to the Mentor role in both councils.

In this quarter, there has been a significant change in terms of allocating Mentors to Mentees. Previously Mentors were allocated to new Foster Carers on approval, or where it was felt that providing a Mentor to a more experienced Foster Carer may be beneficial. However, we now allocate a Mentor to applicants during the fostering assessment. This provides the Mentor with the opportunity to develop a relationship with the Mentee prior to approval to enable the Mentee to be better prepared for the fostering role and for the Mentor to be able to actively support their Mentee when a child is placed.

We currently hold regular quarterly meetings (with a virtual option) with our Mentors to discuss any issues around mentoring and to provide updates regarding the fostering service. The fostering social workers who support the Mentors also give advice to colleagues regarding which Carers to refer and when to refer for a Mentor.

A Mentor's Handbook has been developed and disseminated to carers. We have arranged an in-person meeting for all the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Mentors at New Shire Hall on 27th June 2023.

4.6 Fostering Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Focus Group Update

The Fostering Equality, Diversity & Inclusion focus group (which included staff and carers) raised requests for changes to Liquid Logic (the children's data base) to include gender / pronoun preference on demographics. The Liquid Logic change board considered the proposals, the system requires selection of either male or female currently as this data is required by Government, however, the system has now been adapted to give a Mx option. Liquid Logic is continuing to investigate ways of being able to express gender preferences within personal profiles.

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 not just by the Fostering Service but also the wider organisation relevant to caring for children in care. The Fostering service will continue to engage the wider organisation to respond to the Feedback loop to continue to develop the service.

Changes

4.8

The fostering service is entering a period of transformation to enable it to be competitive within the commercial market and to support best practice. As part of this transformation, we will be looking at practice models which includes a network hub model to ensure the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people with complex needs and or whose behaviours challenge can be met in house. An example of such a network model is [Mockingbird](#) (there are other similar models that we are also exploring).

There will be some leadership changes within the fostering service with a change of Assistant Director and Head of Service. The new interim Assistant Director is Brian Relp and he came into post on the 26th of June 2023. The new Head of Service is yet to be confirmed but it is anticipated that an interim will be in place at the point that the current Head of Service Anita Hewson leaves on the 6th of August 2023. Every effort will be made to ensure a smooth transition of the leadership team to ensure as little impact as possible to our Children in Care, Foster Carers and staff.

Fostering Service Annual Report

4.9

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Service provides an annual written report on the management, outcomes and financial aspects of the Local Authority's Fostering Service. This is complete for 2022-2023, the report provides an overview of the activity of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service for the last financial year and is reflective of the shared fostering service. See Joint Fostering Annual Report for details.

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 Joint Fostering Annual Report appended to the Annual Fostering Report.