

# Children's Services Committee

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Statement of Purpose of Norfolk's Fostering Services Annual Review</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>13 November 2018</b>
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	<b>Sara Tough Executive Director Children's Services</b>
<b>Strategic impact</b>  Every fostering service has a statutory requirement to publish, and regularly update, a document which describes the ethos and goals of the fostering service, its management and oversight arrangements and the experience of its staff.  This <b>Statement of Purpose</b> (appendix 1) is a public document, approved by the Children's Services Committee before being made available to foster families, fostered children, their birth parents and guardians, and staff working in the field of fostering. It is also inspected by OFSTED (Office of Standards in Education). The committee paper will focus on a performance review of Norfolk Fostering Service.	

## Executive summary

### The key strengths:

- Norfolk Fostering Service as part of the Children's Services Ofsted Inspection in November 2017, described the fostering service as well-resourced and managed. Fostering Panels were sighted to be effective and placement stability is good. Most importantly for us, OFSTED told us "foster carers are well trained, well supported and well supervised". The Committee will be familiar with the outcomes of the Inspection report. This report serves to update Committee on the key developments within the service, provide data in relation to the Performance of the Fostering Service, outline key activity over the last year and forecast improvements and developments for the following year.
- Norfolk Fostering Service, has been supporting Bromley Children's Services on its improvement journey, by sharing best practice, service development initiatives, including the effectiveness of the Fostering Advisory Partnership.
- Norfolk Fostering Advisory Partnership is now embedded, led by Foster carers and attended by partners including, health, the Virtual School and senior representatives from Children's Services, much progress has been made in shaping and developing the Fostering Service today. There are continuous improvements being made to the Fostering Service in shaping the delivery of fostering services to Norfolk children and young people. The engagement and retention of foster carers has been directly impacted on the success of the Partnership as well as developing quality practice and in the recruitment of new foster carers.
- There have been further strengthened relationships between the fostering service and the fostering panel and panel chairs through quarterly meetings. This has encouraged and facilitated learning from key themes through increased scrutiny of

fostering panel minutes, and feedback to continuously improve the quality of practice and support provided to foster carers in maintaining quality placements.

- The Fostering Service has increased the capacity of the Kinship service to improve the timeliness of fostering assessments, and the packages of support provided to carers post approval. This will continue to be an area of work that will be continuously reviewed.
- With the inception of work that has been undertaken through the transformation board in the implementation and scoping of work undertaken by IMPOWER, the service has begun to build on the marketing, recruitment and retention strategy for increasing capacity within our fostering resource.
- As part of this work, the Fostering Service has empowered foster carer's to be true ambassadors for the Norfolk Fostering Service in championing and encouraging individuals to becoming a Foster Carer for Norfolk Fostering Service.
- The Fostering Service has continued to grow and develop our cohort of foster carer trainers

#### **The key areas of challenge:**

- Recruiting more foster carers, this year's target is 40 new foster carers rising to 60 (2019/20) the following year and 99 in 2020/21
- Increase placement choice for children requiring a foster home, keeping children close to their community with our foster carers.
- Ensuring diversity in our community is reflected in our recruitment and approval of foster carers to meet the needs of all our looked after children and being representative of our looked after population.
- Ensuring the infrastructure resources such as increased support teams/social workers are in line with increased growth of foster carer recruitment
- Providing foster homes for children stepping down to foster care having lived in children's homes.
- Work across children's services to implement the improvement plans and ensure children are in the right placement for the right amount of time.
- To increase capacity within the Linked Families short-breaks team

#### **Next year we will:**

- Improve accessibility of our fostering website to include short videos.
- Establish a foster carers ambassador scheme as part of our recruitment and retention strategy
- Develop a targeted brand awareness campaign
- Run social media recruitment campaigns and events throughout the year
- Develop a model of foster carers focussed on providing step down placements to family life for children in residential care.
- With the Fostering Advisory Partnership ensure the needs of children in foster care are addressed in the recommissioning of child and adolescent mental health service
- Review the learning and development programme to ensure it continuously meets foster carers needs
- Re-establish an annual celebration event, along with differing ways to continuously recognise and value foster carers
- Review and develop the support and training offer to Special Guardian Carers

## **Recommendations:**

**Committee is invited to endorse and approve the Statement and Purpose and provide scrutiny and challenge to the fostering service.**

### **1. Proposal**

- 1.1 Members are asked to scrutinise the information within the report and provide challenge to the service to ensure continued improved outcomes for Norfolk children and families.
- 1.2 Members are asked to recommend approval to full Council of the Statement of Purpose and Functions for the Local Authority Fostering Service to comply with the Care Standards Act 2000.

### **2. Evidence**

- 2.1 Norfolk County Council (NCC) has identified an imperative and opportunity to increase the size and placement share of the in-house fostering service.
- 2.2 With support from IMPOWER, NCC has developed proposals to grow and develop the in-house fostering service based on in depth analysis -including a foster carer survey, staff survey, business analysis and co-production with staff and foster carers.
- 2.3 **Numbers of children in Foster Care, Foster Carers, number of Carer Households and Placement Stability.**
  - 2.3.1 At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 437 children and young people were placed in mainstream and friends and family foster homes provided by Norfolk Fostering Service.
  - 2.3.2 75 young adults remained in their foster placement after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, supported by Norfolk County Council under a staying put arrangement.
  - 2.3.3 Norfolk Fostering Service supported 386 approved foster carers across Norfolk at the end of March 2018 in households, including 81 mainstream foster care households, 81 friends and family (kinship) foster carers and 24 short break carers. The number of fostering households has declined by 8 in comparison to 398 fostering households in 2017.
  - 2.3.4 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were 437 children placed with Norfolk foster carers compared to 446 in 2017.
  - 2.3.5 36 Foster Carer placements were subject of their placements endings in an unplanned way during 2017/18, compared with 18 and 14 for the two years before. Nationally in 2017, 2,910 children experienced an unplanned placement ending representing a rate of 5.6% the Norfolk rate is 3.1%.
  - 2.3.6 In light of the increase in unplanned endings of foster placements A revised, Disruption Policy and process has been developed which requires all fostering placements that have an unplanned ending to hold a disruption meeting chaired by Head of Social Work or Independent Review Officer (IRO) at the earliest opportunity. This will encourage and capture learning from these placements and

better inform areas of training and support required for foster carer's that will be developed and rolled out within the Fostering Service alongside Children's Services.

## **2.4 Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers**

- 2.4.1 In 2017/18 we had 370 initial enquiries and 120 newly approved fostering households. Of those households, 97 were temporary approvals of friends or family carers that facilitated children and young people living with their connected carer's or family member. 23 of these went onto have a full fostering assessment and were fully approved as foster carers.
- 2.4.2 In the same period 132 households left the register of which 88 were temporary friends and family foster carers usually becoming special guardians as a consequence of concluded care proceedings. 44 mainstream foster carers left the Service due to retirement as young people had turned 18 years and those carers resigned from fostering, and changes to personal circumstances.
- 2.4.3 All foster carers who are planning to resign or have resigned will be offered an "exit" discussion by the Head of Fostering and Adoption, to capture and inform improved practice within the Service and to assist development.
- 2.4.4 On average Norfolk Fostering Service has on average of 25 vacancies at any one time. Foster carers can be on hold for a variety of reasons including family circumstance, ill health, the needs of a child already placed or rarely as a result of concerns that relate to allegations being investigated.
- 2.4.5 The Fostering Service continues to review our foster carer's capacity on a daily basis as we strive to place children with Norfolk Foster Carers, keeping them close to their community.

## **2.5 Concerns and Allegations against Carers and Child Protection Enquiries**

- 2.5.1 There were 23 referrals and discussions with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) relating to Norfolk foster carers between April 2017 and March 2018, of which 21 resulted in an investigation, with only 2 being referred to fostering panel for a full review of their foster carer approval status.
- 2.5.2 This compares to 7 investigations the year before and 1 the year before that. All our foster carers have access to an independent advice and mediation worker employed by the Fostering Network and based in Norfolk.
- 2.5.3 Our foster carers are provided with individual membership of the Fostering Network – this provides access to a comprehensive website which includes library items on fostering, help lines, legal and medical advice, stress counselling and a new on-line community. It also provides the support of a solicitor and a worker who provides advice, mediation and advocacy for our foster carers. The Fostering Network is well used by our carers.

## **2.6 Incidents of Restraint and Children Going Missing from Care**

- 2.6.1 There were 2 incidents of restraint on children by Norfolk foster carers between April 2017 and March 2018 compared to 9 and 6 in the previous 2 years. All our

foster carers are taught de-escalation techniques, restorative approaches and longer courses are available to help carers therapeutically re parent children. All incidents of restraint are reviewed by the Head of Fostering and Adoption.

- 2.6.2 Fourteen children/young people went missing from a Norfolk foster home in 2017/18 on 49 separate occasions. Last year 8 children were missing on 17 occasions. A return interview is offered on each occasion when a child goes missing, as this assists in understanding the reasons for the missing episode, the risks and the actions to be taken to mitigate these reducing further missing episodes. The Fostering Service works in collaboration with Children's Services in these particular cases closely to address and mitigate risks as part of the team around the child in adopting a Signs of Safety approach.

## **2.7 Support for and Supervision of Foster Carers**

- 2.7.1 All foster carers receive regular support and supervision they need in order to care properly for children placed with them. Foster cares receive supervision every six to eight weeks. All foster carers have an annual review.
- 2.7.3 Norfolk Fostering Service should complete one unannounced visit to each fostering household per year. As at 12 July 2018, 58 carer households had not had an unannounced visit within timescales visits. Work is underway within the Fostering Service to address this deficit. As a percentage 83% of unannounced visits are in time scale. The indicator of performance in this area is that 100% of unannounced visits will be undertaken during 2018/19.
- 2.7.4 In the last year,10 fostering households have transferred from being agency foster carers (From an IFA (Independent Foster Agency) to becoming in-house Norfolk Fostering Service Foster Carers. They are clear the quality of support and training offered is a key factor in their decision to transfer. In the last 4 years no foster carers have left Norfolk Fostering Service to join an agency (IFA).

## **2.8 Foster Carer Training**

- 2.8.1 Norfolk Fostering Service provides a wide range of training opportunities for foster carers. In addition to the mandatory courses of safeguarding and emergency aid, a variety of long and short courses are available both face-to-face and on-line via e-learning technology. Foster Carer attendance on the training courses remain high with 1,152 foster carers accessing 161 courses during 2017/2018. Only 9 courses were cancelled due to low numbers. The training and development offer to foster carers is continuously reviewed. An improved training and Support Offer to Special Guardians is being developed.
- 2.8.2 Foster carers are encouraged to complete a certificate in 'Training, Support and development Standards for Foster Care'. Foster carers are meant to complete this training within 12 to 18 months after their approval. As at the 12 July 2018, 2 fostering households had not completed the training to meet the Standard in the required timescale. 99% of carer household have completed or are on course to complete the training and meet the Standard within time scale.

## **2.9 Complaints**

- 2.9.1 Between April 2017 and March 2018, Norfolk County Council received 14 complaints relating to the fostering service, compared to 19 in 2017/18. The

learning from such complaints is disseminated within the Service and assists with continuous service improvement and development.

### **3. Finance Implications**

3.1 There are no financial implications from recommending this report

### **4. Issues, risks and innovation**

4.1 It is critical in performing its duty as a corporate parent that the committee scrutinises the functioning of its fostering service.

### **5. Background**

5.1 Please see attached Statement of Purpose (appendix 1)

### **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, e.g. equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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