

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	02 December 2020
Title of Report:	Fostering Service Update
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services)
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This briefing provides an update on the work of the Plymouth City Council in-house fostering service and the actions that have been taken to drive up the number of available in-house foster placements.

Update

Every local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of good quality local placements available for children and young people in care. The provision of foster care, where care is provided in a family home with skilled and empathetic carers, is at the heart of this duty. With sufficiency of foster placements, the majority of children and young people in care whose plan is for permanent long term foster care, will be able to live with a family throughout their childhood, and the best foster carers and placements provide warmth, encouragement and stability which enable children to go on to live happy and productive adult lives.

Plymouth City Council uses a range of placements to provide care and support for children and young people. Some provision is provided in-house, with other placements commissioned from a range of externally commissioned providers. Externally commissioned providers range from small, locally owned companies to large national providers working across the health and social care sectors. Providers are owned and managed in a variety of ways, from charities and social enterprise to privately financed organisations.

The preference is to be able to place children in local authority foster care where possible, prioritising the use of a non-profit making fostering service as opposed to higher cost independent fostering agency placements and enabling more children to remain in their communities. Over recent years the 'market' for foster care has become increasingly competitive, with prospective foster carers able to choose from a wide range of local authority, charitable and privately owned independent fostering agencies (IFA's).

Plymouth City Council currently operates an in-house fostering service, advertised under the slogan "Foster for Plymouth", with opportunities for prospective carers to become full time foster carers, respite carers or parent and child carers. The service also offers assessments for connected carers and private fostering arrangements.

Over a number of years, we had seen a slow decline in the number of children and young people in in-house foster placements.

The actions that have been taken over the past year have been taken to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people in care, with more children able to be supported in permanent, family-based placements provided by Plymouth City Council foster carers. An increase in the availability of local authority foster carers will also reduce overall spend by reducing the numbers of children and young people being placed in higher cost care placements.

An In-House Fostering service review in October 2019 made a series of recommendations which led to a service re-design in March 2020. This re-design and the actions taken since then have been to achieve an ambition to ensure we have enough foster carers available on an ongoing basis. There are two key aspects to this:

- Recruitment - recruiting new carers to increase the number of available placements and replace those who retire or leave fostering
- Retention – supporting and training foster carers so that they continue caring

Overall, a target was set to achieve a net increase of 21 in-house placements by April 2021. We have also set targets to achieve in the two following years, 36 new placements each year.

2. PROGRESS

Marketing:

Plymouth City Council has commissioned a national marketing agency with strong experience in the fostering sector to lead our marketing approach. Marketing activity was delayed due to the unexpected impact of the first Covi-d-19 lockdown, however since June 2020, a new website and new social media platforms have been created and are regularly updated with engaging content including films of our amazing foster carers and their families. Key campaigns including 'are you looking for a career change' have run on-one and off-line. This has included visible community placement such as bus backs and petrol pumps.

Recruitment activity:

Since the launch of this activity we have seen a five-fold increase in direct website visits per month from 584 to 2483 in October and an average of 18 enquiries per month (compared to average of 6 in preceding months).

Summary of Foster carer assessment and approvals 2020-21

Number of fostering households assessed or currently undergoing assessment	19
Number of children's placements across these fostering households?	34
How many of these fostering households have already been approved to date in 2020?	6
How many of these fostering households are due to be approved by March 2021?	All

Support and Retention of existing foster carers:

Retaining experienced carers as well as recruiting new ones, is key to achieving our overall targets for the service. In order to ensure we are offering an effective and competitive offer, further research has been undertaken to inform a new support offer for carers. This will encompass a number of layers of support.

Support for all carers will include 'around the clock' access to support and advise; a supervising social worker; a more developed 'buddy' service; monthly support groups; family support workers to work alongside carers and children at key points of change or need; additional training to support a trauma-informed approach to care; access to advanced therapeutic support were necessary, as well as extra

benefits for carers, their families and children and young people, such as discounted or free access to a range of local activities and services.

Skills to Foster training has continued in virtual format in the current Pandemic Context in common with other key elements of contact such as 'virtual bubbles' and support groups.

A review of Fostering Allowances is underway to ensure we are offering a comparable rate to support children's placements.

3. NEXT STEPS

Over the remainder of 2020/2021 and into the following year, we will continue to maintain a relentless focus on recruitment, retention and the provision high quality support to achieve the very best care and outcomes for our Children in Care. This will be achieved through the progression of our forward marketing plan and support plans as well as a wider improvement plan that sets out the training and development needs within the service.

Alternative options considered and rejected
not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan
[Click here to enter text.](#)

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The fostering service is on track to achieve or exceed its Savings Delivery Plan targets and to work to support our placement sufficiency targets to provide family placements to children in care in and close to the city.

No adverse financial implication is anticipated as a result of the review of support and allowances since Plymouth already has a regionally competitive allowance in place.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

Local placements ensure we limit travel to locations far from the city when visiting children in care.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

Supporting a range of placement options is important to ensure we can meet all children's needs who need to be looked after.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment (if applicable)							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Jean Kelly, Service Director CYPFS											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 24/11/2020											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Jemima Laing – approved by email Date approved: 24/11/2020											