

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	08 September 2021
Title of Report:	Fostering Sufficiency and Marketing
Lead Member:	Councillor David Downie
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Jane Anstis and Sarah Hunt
Contact Email:	Jane.anstis@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Fostering230821
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

This report provides an update for members on the progress of the fostering service and its fostering placements target of 36 new placements for children (2021/22).

Background

In March 2020, Plymouth's Fostering Service was restructured to support improved practice. A Recruitment and Assessment team was developed to focus on increasing the number of in-house foster carers in the city to support children in care close to home in a family setting.

Recruitment Marketing

There is a regional and national shortage of foster carers. Interest in the early part of the pandemic has not resulted in any significant uplift in the number of in-house foster carers (or those being approved by Independent Fostering Agencies). In Plymouth, we continue to work hard to attract new carers to our service.

An external sector-experienced marketing agency was commissioned to support this plan. Whitespace has delivered key elements of recruitment activity including a new Foster for Plymouth website providing detailed information relating to all avenues of fostering for Plymouth and downloadable Information booklets; a marketing strategy; general and key themed fostering campaigns; creation of core images and branding; social media planning and posting.

To date, our campaigns have focused on:

- Promoting fostering as a key way for local families to offer children in care in Plymouth a bright future.
- Fostering as a positive way to support career development for local people interested in social care.
- Targeting specific needs such as care for older children and adolescents.

As set out above, challenges to recruitment in Plymouth mirror those regionally and nationally and within the public and private sectors. Plymouth will continue to build on the foundations of its marketing work today but increasingly look to re-establish direct marketing in our community and

explore options for regional collaboration. Marketing opportunities have been challenged during the pandemic, as many of the events and community based advertising opportunities were not possible due to lockdown. This is slowly beginning to ease and we will take advantage of this in the autumn.

Our recruitment focus for the coming quarter is carers for adolescents and there is a growing need of alternative to home care for this age range. We have a launch in August that is revisiting promoting fostering as a career but also to highlight fostering teenagers as a campaign in its own right. The launch will come with a press release, bus back advertising, digital display at Barcode, and presence at the sea food festival in September.

Our incredible foster carers have been active supporters and participants in a range of marketing activity, providing material for the Foster for Plymouth website; testimonials; personal accounts of their own journey into fostering and some have taken part in radio, film and advertising.

The birth children of foster carers have provided their stories of living with foster children and children and young people in foster care have also shared their experiences and achievements.

Key Targets and Progress

In 2020/ 21 the service had a target to achieve a net gain of 21 new foster placements (14 fostering households). 16 new households (30 new placements) were recruited.

Alongside this, however, a number of very longstanding foster carers retired during the course of that year. A proportion of these were expected each year however with an ageing cohort of carers, some with health needs, Covid-19 did have a part to play for some carers in reaching early decisions to cease fostering. As a result, 17 households (30 placements) ceased.

During this financial year (2021-22), recruitment activity is seeking to achieve a net gain of 36 foster placements (24 fostering households). This has been modelled over 12 Months on a net gain of 2 Households/3 Placements per month basis. We have successfully recruited 4 households (6 placements) to date and a further 7 households and 12 placements will be approved by November. Beyond this, we continue to seek to attract more applicants via our website and other marketing activities.

Support and Retention:

We continue to work to ensure that Plymouth foster carers are valued, well supported and continue to receive good training and development opportunities. These areas were positively commented upon within the 2021 Fostering survey completed in July of this year. Plymouth foster carers have an allocated Supervising Social Worker who provides individual and group development and support. Our training and development offer embraces trauma informed parenting and promotes good understanding of the experiences of children and young people in care. Children and Adolescent Mental Health services provide consultation and training for Plymouth carers. In March 2022 fostering practitioners will receive training in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy which will support a therapeutic framework from which to support and educate further Plymouth carers regards trauma informed approaches. To enable a ground up approach to knowing our carers well, we have monthly listening events and annual meet the leadership team events. These have been well received and have provided a line of communication that helps to influence our direction of travel regards meaningful support.

Next Steps:

As a service we are working hard to improve core aspects of our response, including emergency provision. We are working to attract and approve 3 households who will offer emergency foster placements to children and young people to prevent the need for residential placements or placements outside of the city.

Foster for Plymouth is a campaign supported by Plymouth's HR department to increase the number of people who work for Plymouth to be supported to care for children through some flexibility in their

working lives (for instance, to attend meetings and training). We will relaunch this campaign and look to employers across the city to join this with us.

Alongside foster carers, the Fostering Service assesses, approves and supports special guardians and connected carers. Special guardians are usually family members or friends of a child’s birth family. They may be long term foster carers who want to legally and permanently secure a child’s placement with them. This is an area of our work currently under review to improve and extend.

Ensuring children and young people are able to remain in their local community when they need care outside their families is a continual focus for our service and our recruitment, retention and service development work remains ambitious and determined to achieve that aim.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

The Fostering Delivery Saving’s plan is linked to regular annual savings to be achieved for CYPFS. Placing children with foster carers provides a more cost effective as well as preferable care plan for children in care in Plymouth.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

no immediate impact

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.*

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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											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes – Alison Botham Date agreed: 25/08/2021											
Cabinet Member approval: Yes - <i>Cllr Dave Downie</i> Date approved: 25/08/2021											