

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	16 February 2022
Title of Report:	Fostering Sufficiency and Marketing
Lead Member:	Councillor David Downie, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Children and Young People
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Jane Anstis and Sarah Hunt
Contact Email:	Jane.anstis@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
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. A Friends and Family Team was also created to progress assessments known as Connected Carer Assessments and Special Guardianship Assessments. These assessments are aligned to family or friends care arrangements.

Since restructuring we have seen an increase in the number of family care arrangements within Plymouth and to ensure that we are providing the right level of support to include financial support, an internal review was commissioned to look at Plymouth's current policies, financial framework and support offer.

The development of a Special Guardianship Service is in the process of developments to improve our capacity to meet the needs of the current and future cohort of Special Guardianship Carers and also to ensure we have an offer that serves all the Special Guardianship Carers living within Plymouth.

Recruitment Marketing

We continue to see a regional and national shortage of foster carers and this is evident in 2021 -2022 recruitment; this is true of both in-house fostering services and independent fostering agencies. We recognise that despite wide ranging and far reaching marketing campaigns we have not generated a significant uplift of new in house foster carers. We are projecting in this financial year to have created 8 new households and 13 new homes (placements). Whilst in the early stages of the pandemic (2020-2021) we achieved 16 new households and 30 homes (placements) we have not received the same level of enquiries or applicants this financial year and this maybe down to the longevity of living within a pandemic.

We have continued to work closely with an external sector-experienced marketing agency. The contract is due to end in February 2022 and tendering for a new marketing contract will be completed by the end of February. Marketing has continued to include the development and growth of the Foster for Plymouth website and Social media platforms with up to date articles about fostering, testimonials from foster carers and birth children, Myth busting questions and answers and information available relating to the fostering application process. Further marketing through social media, paid advertising and optimising searches on google that lead to Foster for Plymouth being a dominant find will be a primary marketing focus.

We are seeing a high number of visitors to the website and an improving picture regards to the downloading of the Foster for Plymouth Information Booklet. We have a rich suite of publicity images and messaging that have been used within a number of fostering campaigns. There is a continued social media presence that includes Plymouth City Council website, face book and twitter. The website can be found at www.fosterforplymouth.co.uk

To date, our campaigns have focused on:

- Promoting foster carers for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in line with Plymouth supporting the National Transfer Scheme.
- Promoting an Emergency Foster Carer Scheme to support children of any age to have access to regulated care in an emergency.
- Promoting prospective Foster Carers to support caring for Plymouth teenagers.
- Promoting prospective Foster Carers to choose a Local Authority Fostering Service instead of the independent sector
- There has been ongoing messaging regards to Fostering for Plymouth , changing careers and receiving a fee for a foster carer role

Fostering campaigns have attracted foster carers interested in caring for a younger age range of children. Despite promoting the breadth of support, training and development provided to foster carers this unfortunately is a consistent picture.

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. A direct marketing timeline will involve corporate events such as the Seafood Festival. The recruitment and Assessment team will be promoting face to face presence in public facing arenas and this will remain in line with Covid-19 government guidelines.

We continue to see excellent care and support from our existing Foster Carers. They remain involved in fostering campaigns and we have had some success in Plymouth Foster Carers successfully referring new prospective carers as part of our 'refer a friend' scheme.

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 will have successfully recruited 8 households and 13 homes (placements) by March 31st. We are still seeing established foster carers ceasing to foster and are predicting a 14 home (placement) reduction.

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 2021. 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.

Plymouth have an increasing number of Special Guardians (carers who in law share parental responsibility with the child's parents but can make almost all the care decisions) and Connected Carers (these are family/friend related foster carers) providing alternate to home care. Plymouth maintains a strong value base in promoting children live within their family, when it is safe to do so. The Friends and Family Team provide therapeutic support, advice, education on parenting a non-birth child and more recently have provided support in the community through coffee mornings. To ensure that we have a wide reaching support offer further resource is required to ensure that we have the right level and type of support in place that secures a child's permanence when they are unable to live with birth parents.

Next Steps:

Marketing Plymouth as a destination of choice to become a foster carer will remain a primary focus of future campaigns. Optimising search engine activity will require promoting our financial and therapeutic support to prospective carers and ensuring that we have paid advertising that supports profiling Plymouth as a leading fostering option.

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.

Recommendations and Reasons

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

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.*

[Click here to enter text.](#)

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:

Fin	djn.2 1.22. 255	Leg	LS/3 8047 /AC/ 8/2/2 2	Mon Off	Click here to enter text.	HR	Click here to enter text.	Asset s	Click here to enter text.	Strat Proc	Click here to enter text.
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Jean Kelly											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes – Alison Botham Date agreed: 08/02/2022											
Cabinet Member approval: Yes – Councillor David Downie Date approved: 08/02/2022											