

Report title	Annual Fostering Report 2020-2021
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People
Wards affected	All wards
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Service
Originating service	Children and Young People in Care Service
Accountable employee	Lisa Whelan Service Manager Tel 01902 553067 Email Lisa.whelan@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Children and Young People's Leadership Team 17 June 2021

Recommendation for decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the attached Annual Fostering Report 2020-2021

Recommendations for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note:

1. The development, progress, and future objectives of the Fostering Service.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To inform of the developments, progress, and future objectives of the fostering service.

2.0 Background

2.1 This report provides a description of the structure, aims and duties of the City of Wolverhampton Fostering Service and details the performance of the service over the last twelve months. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) requires that all Fostering Services provide written reports to their Executive or Trustees on a regular basis. In the case of Local Authorities, the 'executive' is the Elected Members of the City of Wolverhampton.

2.2 The Fostering Service is located within the Children and Young People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC). The Fostering Service recruits, supports, and develops foster carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care.

2.3 The activity of the service works in conjunction with the following legislation:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children & Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010 & Update 2013

2.4 The Fostering Service was last inspected by Ofsted as part of a Single inspection of Children's Services in January 2017 and was rated 'Good'.

2.5 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to find enough appropriate Fostering provisions in its local area. The Fostering Service is committed to provide stability, care, and security to children in care and ensure that foster carers can meet the individual needs of children. As such the Recruitment Marketing Strategy outlines how we aim to provide placement choice. The importance of placing children within their family and friend's network, within their community and with their siblings remains paramount in securing stability for the child as well as ensuring their education is not disrupted and their well-being promoted.

2.6 The Fostering Service seeks to provide a comprehensive and excellent quality foster care to all children in the care of the City of Wolverhampton. Foster carers provide children in care a positive experience of family life within an environment that promotes their physical, emotional and health needs. Working in partnership with Health, Education and other allied professionals enables foster carers to provide a warm, safe, and caring family environment ensuring that the children's emotional health and development is promoted. Foster carers ensure children in care have access to available opportunities to promote children's attendance and their academic achievements, thus maximising all opportunities for children to achieve their full potential.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- A Net Gain of 23 foster carers have been achieved considering both mainstream and connected carers and that some have transferred to SGO during the year. Success in all areas has impacted on the overall net gain of carers.
- Permanence in general, 18 SGO orders have been achieved.
- Placement stability has steadily increased throughout 2020/21 in both short-term and long-term placements.
- Despite the Covid pandemic, robust and effective recruitment. Continued increased enquiries supported through sophisticated media campaigns and digital advertising including a TV advert.
- Assessment timeliness has been affected by the Covid pandemic; however, performance remains positive compared to previous years.
- Wolverhampton have been part of the Black Country Fostering Project, whereby 4 authorities have worked collaboratively to assess services with a view to developing and sharing resources.
- The new model of fostering “Foster Families United” has been further developed and there are currently three teams, each led by an experienced carer, supporting up to five fostering families in each team.

4.0 Progress on Key Objectives 2020/21

Objective	Outcome
To achieve the target of a net gain of 27 Mainstream Foster carers to provide for the diverse range of children’s needs in 2020-2021.	A net gain of 23 carers was achieved. The actual number of carers recruited was 31 (14 mainstream and 17 connected) however with 8 de-registrations throughout the year, the year ended with a net gain of 23
To complete connected assessments in timescales as directed and achieve a net gain of connected foster carers whilst acknowledging that successful conversion to SGO’s will impact on overall gains.	There have been 17 connected carers approved during 2020-21. Whilst, 11 carers have converted to SGO
To achieve 10 Special Guardianship Orders.	18 Special Guardianship orders were achieved – 8 conversion of connected to SGO and 3 conversion of mainstream to SGO)
To embed a Special Guardianship Team within the Support function of the Fostering Service with a designated senior social worker leading a team including a social worker and administrator with Welfare knowledge to deliver support both during	A designated Special Guardianship Team was developed with the fostering support team, led by a senior social worker with oversight by the team manager. Two social workers complete special guardianship reports in respect of connected carers and provide support to strengthening

Objective	Outcome
<p>SGO assessment, developing a robust support plan and maintain oversight post SGO to ensure plans are reviewed from both a support and financial perspective. An action plan has been formulated and will be reviewed quarterly to ensure all objectives are on track and SGO carers are appropriately supported.</p>	<p>family's teams in completing reports. All SGO support plans are scrutinised by the SGO team before they are signed off. The team also monitor support plans and review financial plans in conjunction with welfare rights. The SGO received some additional funding during the Covid pandemic, via the DfE and this allowed the service to recruit an additional worker, who provided support to SGO carers.</p>
<p>To develop and embed an SGO carers portal to share pertinent information regularly with SGO carers.</p>	<p>A SGO portal is now live and available to all SGO carers. Items include policies/documents, SGO training information, an events calendar, and a booking system if a chat with support staff is required. A library of podcasts and news items are also featured.</p>
<p>To further expand and embed the Foster Carer Portal to promote access by all carers to the offered training opportunities, Information, Policy & Procedures, and developmental information.</p>	<p>The Foster Carer portal continues to expand and is regularly updated with news items and pertinent information to share with carers. This has been a key form of communication with carers during the Covid 19 pandemic and video clips of how carers have managed home schooling etc. have been shared on the portal and on city people.</p>
<p>Wolverhampton Fostering will continue to work collaboratively with authorities within the West Midlands consortium, sharing ideas and pertinent information and engage in any projects set up to further expand the concept of shared resources.</p>	<p>Service and Team managers attend the regional meetings, where authorities from across the West Midlands share information, ideas and support each other with recruitment strategies. The BCF Project was commended.</p>
<p>To further develop existing and new carers to provide for children's needs, promote understanding, resilience of carers and placement stability by reviewing policies to include short breaks/respice, buddy system and additional benefits available to foster carers.</p>	<p>Despite the Covid pandemic, carers have been supported through fostering forum groups, virtual training, disruption meetings to consider support to maintain placements and ongoing communication via the foster carer's portal. Referrals for buddy support were addressed and short breaks were offered to several carers to provide additional support to placements. The annual fostering conference moved on-line in two parts with a focus on supporting mental health of children in care.</p>
<p>To continue to review recruitment materials and processes and continue to implement the recommendations from the Family Values Project undertaken by iMPower whilst being open minded to all ideas and development opportunities that will enhance</p>	<p>The Family Values steering group has met monthly throughout 2020-2021. Despite Covid and social distancing restrictions, recruitment events have progressed on-line whilst fostering has been promoted on social media and a TV advert on Sky was shown during December 2020.</p>

Objective	Outcome
<p>and improve the Fostering Service which include visiting other authorities particularly those who have recruited high numbers of foster carers and achieved significantly improved outcomes.</p>	<p>Fostering continues to work collaboratively with other local authorities and managers attend quarterly fostering meetings within the West Midlands consortium whilst Black Country Fostering authorities commenced a second project to focus on how authorities could share resources to support foster carers.</p> <p>During 2020-2021 Wolverhampton attended an event organised by iMPower to discuss progress within the service with authorities who have previously been part of an iMPower project.</p>
<p>The focus on Private Fostering needs to continue to be strengthened and the profile promoted to increase awareness and understanding of this often-misunderstood area of care. Further training opportunities to be offered across Children's Social Care, with partner agencies and the voluntary sector and to ensure the quarterly forum is well attended by champions from partner agencies and all relevant materials shared.</p>	<p>See Private Fostering Annual Report</p>
<p>In the light of the Covid 19 pandemic and the uncertainty of working arrangements, develop virtual practices and opportunities for foster care recruitment, assessment, supervision, and training.</p>	<p>The Fostering Service has continued to work "virtually" throughout the pandemic. Supervisions between foster carers and social workers have been undertaken either via Microsoft Teams or face to face, as restrictions eased. Recruitment events have without exception been undertaken virtually via social media platforms whilst additionally, promotional information has been shared throughout via the carer's portal, social media, chronicle adverts and on the council website. All assessments for potential carers have included at least one face to face visit before presentation at the fostering panel.</p>
<p>To further develop virtual fostering panels going forward to ensure increased attendance and minimise travel arrangements for those who reside a distance away.</p>	<p>All Fostering panels have been undertaken virtually via Teams throughout the pandemic. Panel members have all been receptive to the changes and IT equipment has been provided to support panel members.</p>
<p>The "Foster Families United" (FFU) project to expand during 2020 with a target of two further teams of up to seven carers led by an experienced Level 4 carer to be implemented by end June 2020 with a further step-down team by the end of September 2020 working</p>	<p>During 2020-21, three FFU teams were developed, each led by an experienced Level Four carer, with at least four fostering families in each team. In May 2020, a young person was stepped down and placed with a foster carer, who was part of an FFU team. The Covid pandemic restricted face to face</p>

Objective	Outcome
in conjunction with K2I Residential unit, with the expectation that staff will work closely with K2I and Children's care plans in identifying appropriate foster placements. The team carer will plan activities for the carers and will provide additional support in line with the model. Further consideration to be given to how family and friends carers can be incorporated within the model. Progress regarding this pilot will be shared with senior managers in June 2020. Media campaigns have begun in respect of this project and it will feature in both mainstream and targeted events and on job sites throughout the year.	meetings/activities arranged by the lead carer, however telephone support continued and ensured that carers felt supported, particularly at times of crisis or placements at risk of breakdown. Foster Families United is promoted at all fostering events, with two targeted campaigns throughout the year. It is reported by the marketing manager that FFU is a major incentive for prospective applicants.

5.0 Key Objectives 2021-2022

- To achieve the target of a net gain of 25 foster carers to provide for the diverse range of Children's needs.
- To further improve the support services available to special guardians.
- To increase the number of children linked and matched with their long-term foster carer.
- To develop a fully electronic operational carers' register, reflecting the carers status and related compliance record for each carer which provides at a glance compliance information on carers with regard to minimum standards and fostering regulations.
- To devise a Placement Matching Policy, to guide best practice when a child comes into our care or needs to move to a new home. This will ensure that children and young people are placed at the outset with carers who understand their needs and provide them with a sense of belonging regardless of their diverse needs.
- To continue to develop the foster carers portal, including all information to support carers and children and young people in their care, particularly key cultural events of all faiths to reflect the diverse needs of our children and young people in care.
- To develop and implement an action plan focussed on Standards of Practice, to include processes at foster home reviews, further improve the quality of foster homes, and ensure supervising social workers and children's social worker across all of children's services are working together to improve children's outcomes.
- To develop an electronic Performance Dashboard to measure our progress and achievements and ensure we maintain good practice standards.

- Ensure that vacant carers are regularly reviewed, and carers are supported in returning to their roles if they have been dormant for a period and remain compliant with fostering regulations and minimum standards throughout their vacancy/dormancy.
- The Foster Families United model will be refreshed and relaunched with a priority to recruit external carers to lead FFU teams to support foster families within their teams.
- To ensure the success of the Family Values Project is realised as the project ends and practice moves to business as usual.
- To lead the BCF Project and ensure the key activities are achieved and the potential financial and non-financial benefits are realised.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The annual approved budget for the fostering service for 2020-21 is £6.5 million
- 6.2 The costs associated with the Foster Families United Model are contained within the existing budget for the fostering service.
- 6.3 As more foster carers are recruited and approved in-house costs will increase but cost reductions will be seen against other placement budgets such as residential and independent fostering arrangements.
- 6.4 The average weekly cost of an in-house foster placement is £310 this is a saving of £3672 when compared to the average weekly cost of a residential placement and £456 when compared to the average weekly of an Independent fostering arrangement.
[JG/25062021/F]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The legal relevant legislation and guidance is contained within the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
[SB/29062021/L]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 The fostering service works with foster carers and colleagues from a diverse background to meet the needs of children and young people from a diverse background in respect of ethnicity, culture, age, and disability.

9.0 Environmental implications

- 9.1 The fostering service has a high profile and accesses organisations across the city to promote and develop opportunities to recruit new foster carers and hold events for both carers and children and young people.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 The full annual fostering report 2020-2021 has been attached as an appendix and contains full details of the service with objectives 2020-2021

11.0 Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1: Annual Fostering Report 2020-2021