

Report title	Annual Fostering Report 2021 - 2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
Originating service	Fostering Service	
Accountable employee	Lisa Whelan	Service Manager
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Report has been considered by	Children and Education Leadership Team	8 September 2022

Recommendation for decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the Annual Fostering Report – 2021-2022

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The Annual Fostering Report reflects the function of the fostering service 2021-2022, reviews the progress and sets objectives for service improvement 2022-2023.

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 March/April 2022 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.
of casework. There are currently two full-time vacancies

3.0 Progress

3.1 Key Achievements in 2021-2022:

- a. Permanence, 21 SGO orders have been achieved.
- b. Placement stability has been steadily maintained, however whilst long term stability has reduced by 3.9%, the year ended with more children in internal foster than within external foster care.
- c. Despite the Covid pandemic, robust and effective recruitment. Continued increased enquiries supported through sophisticated media campaigns and digital advertising including a TV advert.
- d. Assessment timeliness has been affected by the Covid pandemic; however, performance remains positive compared to previous years.
- e. 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.
- f. Wolverhampton worked collaboratively with Black Country Authorities to look at ways of further improving consistency of practice, panel relationships were strengthened, and a shared CRM system was agreed.

3.2 Objectives for 2022-2023:

- a. The Ofsted Inspection March/April 2022 highlighted three areas of service improvement – Supervision of fostering staff, foster home reviews and quality of fostering assessments. These areas will be prioritised, and progress reviewed monthly to ensure improvements and achieved and sustained.
- b. Realise a net gain of five foster carers 2022-23.
- c. A return to in-person recruitment events blended with virtual opportunities to enable easier access for some.
- d. Relaunch Foster Families United – September 2022 and ensure the model is encompassed across the cohort of mainstream and connected carers.
- e. To ensure that the Linking and Matching policy is fully understood, and that practice reflects an increase in arrangements. Celebrate the linking and matching of children and young people with foster carers.
- f. A fully functioning foster carers register is in place that reflects the approval status of all mainstream foster carers.
- g. The list of dormant carers reflects a realistic return to fostering or supports carers to make a decision to resign if there is ambivalence regards returning to fostering.

- h. Ongoing support to foster carers to ensure that all consider a 0-18 age range of children and young people and that carers feel confident they can manage the needs of an 0-18 cohort.
- i. Fostering Improvement Action Plan is reviewed via the Family Values monthly meeting to ensure progress is tracked regards Foster Families United, Managing Allegations, Foster Home Reviews, matching, Linking and Matching.
- j. Carers for Disabled Children and Young People continue to be a focus or recruitment and a support offer is developed and agreed.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The annual approved budget for the fostering service for 2021-22 is £6.5 million with costs associated with the Foster Family United model contained within the existing budget.
- 4.2 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 which generate on average a weekly saving of £394.
[JG/13092022/F]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 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/15092022/K]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 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. This is detailed in the body of the report.

7.0 All other Implications

- 7.1 There are no other implications.

8.0 Schedule of background papers

- 8.1 There are no background papers.

9.0 Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1: Annual Fostering Report 2021-2022