

**Results of Fostering Recruitment and Retention Survey**

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**Purpose of this report**

1. The purpose of this report is to feedback to Corporate Parenting Panel on the results of the recent fostering recruitment and retention survey undertaken.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:**

1. **Consider and note the report.**

**Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations**

2. This report has not been to or planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as no recommendation/decisions are required. Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider and note the Fostering recruitment and retention survey.

**Issues**

3. Nationally and locally there is a shortage of foster carers. Figures from a Fostering Network event held in March 2018 (national charity involved in fostering work) indicated that there are 64,000 children in foster care with 1 child entering foster care every 20 minutes. There are approximately 55,000 foster carers with a further 7,000 needed in order to ensure children can be placed with their siblings, close to their family, school and friends and with carers who have the right experience and skills to meet their specific needs.

4. Although CBC have done well in meeting its recruitment targets for foster carers over the last 4 years the question was raised at a recent Corporate Parenting Panel as to whether more could be done to retain the experienced foster carers we already have, for longer.
5. Following Corporate Parenting Panel's query, the Fostering Service undertook a survey with its 111 in house foster carers which focused on recruitment and retention and invited foster carers' feedback regarding different ways of working together to develop the service. The headlines from the survey are outlined below alongside some of the actions already taken or planned to be taken to address the feedback.
6. Details of the respondents
  - 21 foster carers responded to the survey
  - 52% of these have been fostering for more than 7 years
  - 43% indicated they had no plans to stop fostering and 19% indicated they intend to continue fostering for another 5 to 10 years
  - The respondents were all between 45 and 64 years old
  - 89% were White British
7. This cohort reflects the general age and ethnicity of CBC foster carers.
8. The respondents overwhelmingly stated that the best thing about fostering was the support foster carers valued the most and also making a difference to a child's life.

### **Fostering for longer**

9. Nationally, the average length of a foster carers career is 7 years. We do not currently have the final figures for CBC and we are in the process of analysing the data. The findings of this exercise will form part of the yearly report on Fostering which will be presented at the next Corporate Parenting board in July '18.
10. The answers regarding the support that would encourage foster carers to continue to foster varied. Some foster carers wanted us to keep doing what we were doing and continue providing the support and respite we currently offered. Other carers wanted to be paid when they didn't have placements, to improve communication and listen to carers more.
11. Development areas foster carers wanted us to focus on included:
  - Giving better incentives to keep well qualified and experienced staff
  - Improving communication systems as they didn't feel the teams were as well connected since the introduction of hot desking
  - Taking children's savings from source rather than asking foster carers to set up savings accounts
  - Getting children's passports sorted quicker and
  - Better matching of carers first placement

## **Actions**

12. Communication was raised as an area of focus by the foster carers during the Talk Time forum and, as a result, has been raised with team managers within the Corporate Parenting Service. They are working with their social workers in the teams to ensure they communicate effectively with foster carers and include them as part of the professional team around the child. In addition to this the Head of Service for corporate Parenting has started a series of regular meetings with the foster carers where they can feedback directly to the HoS and help in developing the service going forward
13. Carers feedback that it would be better for the children if the children's monthly financial savings are deposited in the children's bank accounts "from source" (this means the money is automatically deducted from the Foster Carers' allowance and deposited in an account for the child). This is due to the fact that the Foster Carers often had difficulties in setting up savings accounts for children without the required documentation banks needed i.e. passports and birth certificates. This has been responded to and as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 all our children have their saving accounts maintained automatically by CBC.

## **Approvals**

14. According to Fostering Regulations, foster carers are approved by the Fostering Panel for a specific number of children. We encourage our foster carers to be approved for up to 3 children as this is the maximum number they can be approved for, (they can care for more children if the children placed are a group of siblings). In this survey, we asked respondents if they would consider extending their approval and what would encourage them to do so.

## **Responses**

15. 33% of the carers questioned were already approved to care for 3 children, 38% were approved to care for 2 children and 29% were approved to care for 1 child.
16. 60% of the carers surveyed stated that they were not planning to increase the number of children they were approved for, 20% **are** considering increasing their approval range and 20% stated that they **may** consider increasing their approval range.
17. Those carers who were not considering increasing their approval range stated this was because they either already had 3 children in placement, were fostering their grandchildren or didn't want to change their approval range unless it fitted with the current children in placement.

18. Foster carers were asked what CBC could do to support them to increase their approval range. Responses included
- Support to help carers adapt their accommodation
  - Approve foster carers for 4 children
  - “Stop saying no” (to potential matches)
  - ‘We may increase our approval if we know the support is there’

## **Actions**

19. We believe that the foster carers need support and need to be able to communicate with their social workers, with the child’s Social Workers and with the service.
20. Increasing their approval is an individual decision for the foster carers. We will ensure that foster carers continue to be supported in their decision making and when carers do extend their approval, appropriate support is in place to ensure carers can manage the additional responsibilities they have taken on.
21. The Service will continue to review foster carers strengths and vulnerabilities through the matching process to ensure that when placements are made they are likely to succeed. This will, on occasions, mean that the Service does not recommend placing some children with some carers.
22. The Service is also currently looking at introducing an interest free loans scheme for foster carers who wish to adapt/extend their homes. This scheme will be introduced as a way of supporting foster carers increase their approval range.

## **Recruitment of Foster Carers**

23. The Fostering Service is committed to recruiting, assessing and supporting a range of high quality foster carers to improve outcomes for looked after children and to ensure children and young people’s stay in foster care is a positive experience.
24. The Fostering Service works to a Recruitment and Retention Strategy which is updated each year. It is based on a needs analysis and is informed by what was successful and unsuccessful in the previous year’s recruitment strategy. Foster carers are consulted as part of the recruitment strategy and are encouraged and supported to help CBC recruit carers from within their own support network/community.
25. In terms of the survey foster carers felt the most effective way of recruiting foster carers was via word of mouth, radio ads, holding village fetes or having leaflets at scouts/church/school events.

26. 65% of foster carers questioned stated that they did not have links with the local community/work where they might recruit foster carers. 35% did have links and suggested the fostering service attended local fetes or contacted scouts/town councils/churches/ schools or put leaflets in shop windows.

### **Actions**

27. The Recruitment, Retention and Training Officer is currently working on the Needs Analysis. This will be discussed with the Head of Service and Practice Manager at a meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> April where there will be a review of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
28. The draft Recruitment and Retention Strategy will be presented at the next Foster Carers 'Talktime' to be held on the 11<sup>th</sup> June to ensure foster carers are consulted and supported in being part of the recruitment strategy themselves.
29. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy will then be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July so Councillors are aware of the Services Recruitment plans and can offer any further suggestions/support in terms of how the service can maximise on its potential to recruit more foster carers so that Central Bedfordshire Looked After Children can be placed in local placements that better meet their needs.

### **Additional Feedback/conclusions**

30. Lastly foster carers were asked for any additional feedback. This ranged from carers stating they were happy with the support received to carers feeling unhappy when their supervising social workers change. Other carers reiterated their wish to be treated as professionals and to be listened to.
31. The findings from this survey are not dissimilar to issues foster carers raise regularly at a national level. Research often highlights the need for foster carers to have access to good training, support and respite, that they want to be treated as a member of the team, have adequate information about children when they are placed and to receive a good level of remuneration with a well-managed payment system in place to ensure carers get paid on time.

### **Council Priorities**

- Children and Families First
- Working as One Team close to our community
- Being great Corporate Parents to children in care and care leavers
- Being a well-managed service and providing great public care

## **Corporate Implications**

32. Not applicable.

## **Legal Implications**

33. This report provides the outcome of a recent fostering survey undertaken, therefore, there are no implications.

## **Financial and Risk Implications**

34. This report provides the outcome of a recent fostering survey undertaken, therefore, there are no financial implications.

## **Equalities Implications**

35. Central Bedfordshire Council have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This report highlights the support needs of foster carers and areas the fostering service need to work on to ensure foster carers feel included as professional partners where their views and opinions are taken into account when developing services for foster carers and looked after children.

## **Conclusion and next Steps**

36. Undertaking this survey has been a useful exercise in many ways. It has confirmed the fact that our foster carers are generally happy with the support and services and plan to continue to foster for some time.

37. The results of this survey will be used to help review the fostering recruitment and retention strategy for 2018/19. The service will continue to consult with foster carers at the foster carers events to ensure Foster Carers contribute to supporting and developing the fostering service to be able to recruit, support and retain the additional carers needed to support looked after children in local placements that better meet their needs.

38. As detailed above, as a result of the feedback from the foster carers, we are in process of jointly reviewing the recruitment strategy, looking at even better ways of listening to each other ('Talktime' sessions and 'Tea with Alex' events) and working together and overall ensuring that great foster carers are recruited, supported and retained as they are key in delivering great outcomes to some of our most vulnerable children.

## **Appendices**

39. None

## **Background Papers**

40. None

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