

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>20 July 2017</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Fostering Service annual report 2016-17</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Key decision**

This is not a key decision.

## **Wards affected**

Countywide

## **Purpose**

To review the fostering service performance and approve related documents.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT:**

- (a) the performance of the fostering service as outlined at appendix a to this report be reviewed, any risks to achievement of objectives noted and relevant mitigating actions approved;**
- (b) the guide for young people that are looked after (appendix b) be approved; and**
- (c) the statement of purpose (appendix c) be approved**

## **Alternative options**

- 1 Under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011 (NMS), Cabinet should receive updates on the management, outcomes and financial state of Herefordshire Council's fostering service; it is open to Cabinet to identify additional or alternative actions to improve performance, but in doing so regard must be had to the resource implications of additional actions. There are no alternative options to the recommendations.

## Reasons for recommendations

- 2 The NMS are issued by the Secretary of State under the Care Standards Act 2000 and detail the conduct and standards required for Fostering Services and as such are taken into account during inspections by Ofsted.
- 3 Standard 25.7 states that the executive of the council
  - a. receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months;
  - b. monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
  - c. satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

## Key considerations

- 4 The annual reports sets out the activity and performance for the Fostering Service during 2016-17. The Fostering Service has successfully grown the numbers of general foster carers, supported lodgings providers and overnight short break carers enabling more children and young people to be cared for within their local community.
- 5 The Service is required to produce a statement of purpose and young people's guide. The statement of purpose and young people's guide have both been updated to reflect changes in the service since last year.

## Community impact

- 6 It is a council priority to safeguard children by ensuring they have a safe place to live. The fostering service, carers charter and looked after children's guide support the council achieving its ambitions in key strategies in the corporate plan, health and wellbeing strategy and children and young people's plan to keep children close to their existing networks.
- 7 Increasing in-house capacity will support children being placed with local carers, enabling them to remain in their current school and facilitate contact with family members. This will also meet objectives set above and within the children and young people's plan.

## Equality duty

- 8 The fostering service welcomes enquiries from all ethnic, religious and cultural groups within Herefordshire. Increase in house fostering capacity will support sufficiency of choice and ensure appropriate matching of children to the right placements, with consideration to ethnicity, culture, religion and disability. Currently we do not have sufficient families able to care for children with complex disabilities, Muslim or Eastern European families. This risks requiring specialist placements out of county. At present we aim to mitigate these risks through specific support plans, training, using buddying or learning from those carers with children from other cultures. Note: Under Section 149, the "General Duty" on public authorities is set out thus:
- 9 "A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct ... prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it."

## Financial implications

- 10 The financial performance of the service was included in the directorate's out-turn report for 2016/17. It is acknowledged the number of looked after children cared for by Herefordshire Council and their consequent placement cost is the single greatest pressure on the directorate's budget. Work is underway to reduce the number of looked after children and, at the same time, we are expanding our pool of council foster carers to ensure both the quality of placements and their cost effectiveness. For this period the fostering service had a budget of £3,754k with an outturn position of being overspent by £422k in 2016/17. The cause of this overspend is the success staff have had in recruiting carers. This will provide sustainable budget benefits in the long term, however this increase was not assumed when the budget was set. If the number of placements being provided in-house had not grown this would have resulted in an even greater spend for the external placements budget as we are required to provide placements for each of our looked after children and would therefore have purchased from independent fostering agencies.
- 11 The external fostering budget which is used to fund Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service (HIPSS), independent fostering agency and residential placements had a budget of £3,832k with an overspend of £566k. This budget is under pressure, as noted above, due to the very high numbers of looked after children in the service. This situation is being addressed through the directorate's safeguarding improvement plan and approach to the medium term financial strategy.
- 12 The financial modelling of the service and actions to support an appropriate reduction in Herefordshire's LAC population is currently being reviewed to provide an approach for the next three years, building on the work done for the medium term financial strategy.

## Legal implications

- 13 The National Minimum Standards for fostering services are issued by the Secretary of State under section 23 of the CSA 2000.
- 14 Herefordshire Council must comply with Standard 25.7 of the National Minimum Standards and provide the executive with a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering services every three months; this will allow the executive to monitor the management and outcomes of the service. The executive must satisfy themselves that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children, they must also satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 15 The registered person must take action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them.

## **Risk management**

- 16 Without an effective fostering service children who need to be looked after by the council may be placed away from their own community. This can cause disruption to their education and relationships with their families and friends.
- 17 If recruitment targets are not met, there is a risk of increased dependence on independent agencies and residential units located further away from a child's networks incurring higher costs and budget pressures. Currently we do not have sufficient families able to care for children with complex disabilities, Muslim or eastern European families. This may require specialist placements to be arranged out of county. We aim to mitigate these risks through specific support plans, training, using buddying or learning from those carers with children from other countries and cultures.

## **Consultees**

- 18 The fostering service annual report was discussed at the children's scrutiny committee on 5 July 2017; they are supportive of the annual report and acknowledged that it is a statutory requirement.
- 19 The committee have requested that the annual report for 2017/18 is presented to them as a draft; to enable them to give the report due consideration and make any recommendations to the cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing for consideration.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A - Fostering annual report 2016/17

Appendix B - The young people's guide

Appendix C – Statement of purpose.

## **Background papers**

- None identified.