

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 27 September 2018
Title of report:	Fostering and adoption Service Annual Reports 2017/18
Report by:	Cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To review Adoption and Fostering Services performance and approve related documents.

The National Minimum Standards are issued by the Secretary of State under the Care Standards Act 2000 and detail the conduct and standards required for Adoption and Fostering Services and as such are taken into account during inspections by Ofsted.

Standard state that the executive side of the local authority:

- receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency
- monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;
- satisfies itself that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration; and
- the executive formally approves the statement of purpose and reviews them at least annually.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the performance of the adoption service as outlined at appendix 1 to this report be reviewed, any risks to achievement of objectives noted and relevant mitigating actions approved;**
- (b) the statement of purpose for the adoption service (appendix 2) be approved;**
- (c) the performance of the fostering service as outlined at appendix 3 to this report be reviewed, any risks to achievement of objectives noted and relevant mitigating actions approved;**
- (d) the statement of purpose for the fostering service (appendix 4) be approved; and**
- (e) approve the executive's response to the recommendations of the children and young peoples' scrutiny committee as per appendix 5.**

Alternative options

1. Under the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014 and Fostering 2011 (NMS), Cabinet should receive updates on the management, outcomes and financial state of Herefordshire Council's adoption and fostering services; 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.

Key considerations

2. The annual reports set out the activity and performance for the Adoption Service and Fostering Service during 2017-18.
3. The Fostering Service is responsible for recruiting, assessing, training and supporting local authority foster carers to provide a home for children and young people who are looked after. Children become looked after because their parents have been assessed as unable to meet the needs of their children, in most cases due to abuse or neglect.
4. The Adoption Service is responsible for recruiting, assessing, training and supporting adopters; matching children with adopters who can meet their needs and supporting those affected by adoption either as a child, adopter or birth family of an adopted child.

Community impact

5. It is a council priority to "keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life". The fostering and adoption services support the council in achieving its ambitions in key strategies in the corporate plan, health and wellbeing strategy and children and young people's plan.
6. Adoption provides a permanency option for looked after children and so where it is in the child's best interests enables children to become part of a family outside of the looked after system. Ensuring every looked after child achieves permanency is a key part of the Corporate Parenting strategy with adoption a key element of this.

7. Fostering provides a safe and secure home for looked after children enabling them to recover from trauma and supporting them to reach their potential. Providing sufficient local carers able to meet these needs is a key priority within the Corporate Parenting strategy.

Equality duty

8. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
9. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The adoption and fostering services welcome applications from all sectors of the community and is ambitious in seeking placements for children whatever their level of need.

Resource implications

10. For 2017/18 the adoption service budget was £661k. At outturn the service had an overspend of £122k which was accrued as a result of purchasing inter-agency placements and being unable to meet the income target for selling placements to other authorities. The Council has been able to recoup £108k costs from a central government fund and this amount is included in the outturn figure. Inter-agency placements are purchased if in-house adopters are not available to meet need either because a child needs to be placed outside of Herefordshire or because a suitable match was not available.
11. The adoption service had an income target of £74k on the basis that the service will be able to sell placements to other authorities. Over recent years it has been very challenging to achieve this target as the service has required more adoptive placements than we have been able to recruit. As other adoption services in the region are now part of regional adoption services they are choosing to place within their own areas. The service didn't sell any placements this year. For 2018/19 the income target has been removed in recognition of this change in adoption service activity.
12. The fostering service had a budget of £4,305k with an outturn position of being overspent by £205k. This relates to the need to provide more in-house placements than was budgeted for. This does mean that it would have cost more in external placements if we had not used in-house placements as we are required to provide placements for each of our looked after children.

13. The external fostering budget which is used to fund, independent fostering agency and residential placements and the Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service (HIPSS) had a budget of £3,676k with an overspend of £1,758k. This budget is under pressure due to the very high numbers of looked after children in the service resulting in there being insufficient placements available in house despite the service being very successful at increasing the numbers of foster carers. The service continues to work hard at recruiting carers and is in the process of refreshing the recruitment strategy to focus upon more targeted recruitment of foster carers particularly for older children, sibling groups, children with a disability and those requiring a long-term foster placement.

Legal implications

14. The scrutiny committee are undertaking a review of the performance of the fostering and adoption service and can make reports or recommendations to the executive concerning the discharge of this function.

Risk management

15. Without an effective adoption service, looked after children would spend longer in the care of the local council. This would be detrimental to their wellbeing and life chances. If the support needs of adoptive families are not met, children may return to the care system. An effective adoption and looked after children's service is important to ensure that we are able to offer a robust and timely approach to securing permanence for children unable to be brought up safely within their own families and to ensure access to services that will best support their individual needs.
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.

Consultees

18. Chairs of the Adoption and Fostering panels have been consulted and had the opportunity to contribute to the annual reports.
19. Children and Young People Scrutiny committee considered this report at their meeting on the 16th July 2018 and resolved that the committee:
 - a. Expresses concern regarding the lack of progress in joining a regional adoption agency and the executive is requested to undertake any available actions to expedite membership of Adoption Central England;
 - b. Requests clarification regarding how the overspend of the fostering service and external fostering budget in 2017/18 have been addressed;
 - c. Asks the executive to approach local cultural and leisure providers to attempt to secure concessionary rates for looked after children; and
 - d. Notes the annual reports 2017/18 for the fostering and adoption services.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Adoption Service annual report 2017-18

Appendix 2 – Adoption Service statement of purpose

Appendix 3 – Fostering Service annual report 2017-18

Appendix 4 – Fostering Service statement of purpose

Appendix 5 – Scrutiny response action sheet

Background papers

None identified