

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Thursday 15 October 2020</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Fostering and Adoption Service Annual Reports 2019/20</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Cabinet member children and families</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To review the Adoption and Fostering services performance report and approve related documents.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- (a) the performance of the adoption service as outlined at appendix A to this report be reviewed, any risks to achievement of objectives noted and relevant mitigating actions approved; and**
- (b) the performance of the fostering service as outlined at appendix B to this report be reviewed, any risks to achievement of objectives noted and relevant mitigating actions approved.**

## **Alternative options**

1. Under the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014 and Fostering 2011 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 2019-20.
3. 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.
4. Herefordshire joined the Adoption Central England (ACE) on 1 July 2019 and became part of the regional service in accordance with government expectations.
5. Key achievements for the Adoption service include:
  - Smooth transition to joining ACE
  - Development and effectiveness of the Early Permanency hub in reducing drift and delay for children with a care plan of adoption
  - Increase in foster to adopt placements.
6. Improvement plans for 2020/21 focus upon:
  - Pre-birth planning and increase in children placed in foster to adopt placements
  - To improve timeliness of children placed for adoption
  - Adopted children and their family are provided with a life story book and later life letter within 2 weeks of their Celebration hearing
7. 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.
8. Key achievements for the service include:
  - Increasing the number of children placed with in-house foster carers
  - Increasing the number of children leaving care for permanency via Special Guardianship Order (SGO)
  - Improving the training offer to foster carers
  - Adapting the service to meet needs and support foster carers during Covid-19
9. Key priorities for improvement during 2020/21 are:

- Increase the number of general Herefordshire Intensive Placement and Support Service (HIPSS) and Sleepover scheme foster carers and the number of supported lodgings providers
- Increase the number of children who are long-term matched with their foster carers
- Increase the number of children leaving care for permanency via SGO

## Community impact

10. Within the County Plan it is a council priority to “strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together”. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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

13. 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.
14. 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. The fostering and adoption services need to increase the diversity of approved foster carers and adopters. Neither service have sufficient carers from Black and Minority Ethnic groups to match with children and young people in care. There is a particular gap in relation to foster carers from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller background. The service is focussing upon increasing the number of children and young people placed with kinship foster carers so that children and young people are able to live with those from the same background as themselves.

15. All foster carers completed mandatory diversity training to ensure that they have an understanding of the importance of understanding the impact of discrimination and what they can do to ensure the needs of children and young people are understood and met. It is important that all children and young people are supported to develop a positive sense of identity.

## **Resource implications**

16. For 2019/20 the adoption service budget was £837k. At outturn the service had an underspend of £30k due to a combination of staffing vacancies and reduction in spend on adoption allowances.
17. The adoption service generated income of £27k from selling placements to other local authorities and spent a total of £90.75k on purchasing adoptive placements resulting in a net cost to the authority of £63.75k. This expenditure and income relates to decisions prior to joining ACE. The need to purchase adoptive placements is much reduced as the service now has access to prospective adopters across the ACE region and any purchases required outside of ACE are met by a budget held within ACE.
18. The fostering service had a budget of £5,124k with an outturn position of being overspent by £109k. 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. The increased spend on placements was off-set to some extent by underspends on staffing due to vacancies during the year.
19. The external fostering budget which is used to fund independent fostering agency, residential placements and the Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support Service (HIPSS) had a budget of £6,690k with an overspend of £751k. 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. The service continues to work hard at recruiting carers and in reducing the number of children who are placed in residential care.

## **Legal implications**

20. 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.
21. Standards 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.

## **Risk management**

22. Without an effective adoption service, looked after children would spend longer in the care of the local authority. 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.
23. Without an effective fostering service children who need to be looked after by the local authority may be placed away from their own community. This can cause disruption to their education and relationships with their families and friends.
24. 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**

25. The reports were presented to the children and young people's scrutiny committee on the 27 July 2020 and the committee confirmed their support for the reports to be submitted to cabinet for their approval.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Adoption Service annual report 2019-20

Appendix B – Fostering Service annual report 2019-20

## **Background papers**

None identified