

REPORT TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S POLICY & SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 21ST JUNE 2018

**SUBJECT OF REPORT: FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT
(REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE MEMBER)**

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: COUNCILLOR LISA PILGRIM

**KEY DECISION: NO
PROGRESS REPORT**

RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue with the current recruitment process, retaining the flexibility to identify and effect improvements as required.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

The recruitment of North Somerset Foster Carers has been a continuous challenge over the last few years, with the number of families available remaining static. This is not an issue just for North Somerset, with many authorities finding the recruitment of families over and above those 'retiring' a challenge.

I would like to draw your attention to the following:

- All vacancies within the recruitment team are now filled with permanent staff allowing a focus on recruitment.
- Different recruitment strategies are being used, including use of Facebook reaching a wider audience.
- The procedure has been amended, with the focus on a one to one discussion at outset, allowing both the potential carer and North Somerset to know if foster caring is right for them at the beginning. The number of families deciding not to proceed at a later stage has reduced, indicating that this change has proved to be successful.
- Different approaches are continually considered to improve our recruitment success.
- With an increase in Carers available, together with the enhanced Therapeutic training being implemented, we should not only be able to care for more of our children in-house but also improve their emotional wellbeing.

2. POLICY

Foster Carer Recruitment

3. DETAILS

Within the fostering service there is an increasingly positive picture to report regarding our support, recruitment and retention of our foster carers.

The team has now secured permanent staffing for all vacancies which has assisted in being able to move forward with our aim in respect of foster carer recruitment and support. The Kinship Team successfully transitioned into the Fostering Team from Adoption in February this year. This is a positive transition for the team due to the remit of the Kinship Team being close to that of the fostering service, however it has caused additional demand on the capacity of the fostering team leader role.

In respect of our foster carer support strategy, there has been an increased engagement of events with our foster carers. A foster carer conference was held in March and well received by all and we have secured use of the employee assistance program for all foster carers which will provide carers with a range of benefits including counselling. Positive feedback has been received from our carers regarding these range of measures however they have stated they wish to see an increase in the current child allowance that is received for fostering. A financial review has been undertaken and is due to conclude shortly to address this issue.

Improved measures have been put in place to respond to foster carer allegations including the commissioning of independent support from foster talk and a key performance measure implemented to achieve all investigations within a 4 week timescale.

The foster carer training program has been reviewed to include increased access to therapeutic training and support to support our carers, increase the emotional wellbeing of children and try to prevent placement breakdowns. A course specialising in support in respect of adolescence and transition is also going to be offered to our foster carers to target stability in this age range as placement disruptions appear more likely within adolescence than others.

Regarding recruitment we recruited 7 foster carers last year which matched our statistics for the previous year. We now have an increased staff team and are optimistic regarding our recruitment opportunities this year. We have increased our social media reach and enhanced our word of mouth recruitment offer to support our targeted recruitment strategy. Currently we have 5 foster carers under assessment. Current recruitment activities in May (which included fostering fortnight) included:-

- Social media campaign - Posting on Facebook, Twitter and social media daily linked in with specified themes e.g. 'proud to foster' dovetailing with fostering fortnight (Fostering Networks theme)
- Press release in the Weston Mercury RE: foster carer shortages (12.05.18).
- Press release advertising our open evening in the Bristol Post
- 31st May – open evening (boosted on social media to raise awareness)
- Bi Monthly 'VANS' advert published.
- Table top displays were put up in Town Hall (library, foyer and front desk) and Castlewood canteen.
- Article in Foster Care newsletter to include an invitation to next ambassadors group and reminding of £1K incentive for recruiting a new carer and offering for carers to carry our business cards promoting fostering.

- Permanent fostering display put up in Town Hall (opposite Tesco Staff entrance) and fostering banner displayed in Foyer.)
- A full take over of the Knowledge dedicated to Fostering Fortnight (internal) and information sent out to all parish councils etc.
- A North Somerset Life article
- Information was put up on the main council website.
- Put leaflets and posters in Castlewood job centre and foyer.
- Met to consider / plan next year's fostering strategy.
- Incentive agreed to encourage North Somerset Staff to promote fostering to others

Snapshot of the Statistics and Information regarding Fostering Recruitment for May 2018

8 new contacts were made during the month of May, with renewed contact from 2 previously interested parties.

The outcomes from the initial contact includes the following::

Call backs have been arranged.

Telephone details requested to enable us to progress.

Could not proceed at the time.

Do not live in North Somerset.

An Open evening was held on the 31st May

The purpose of the open evening was to action interest generated by Foster Carer Fortnight.

The event was quiet despite a Facebook boost and various adverts, with 3 households attending. None of which are in a position to foster for North Somerset currently.

During May 3 home visits have been undertaken.

All 3 households have been invited to the skills to Foster course in June, with 2 interested in mainstream care, and 1 as a supported lodgings host.

Skills to Foster

The next skills to foster course runs on the 7th, 16th and 21st June.

3 households have been invited to attend from those households making contact in May. Despite Foster Care fortnight, there has not been any additional invites generated for this course.

Approvals

No carers were approved at panel during May

However 2 applications are due at panel, in June and August.

4. CONSULTATION

Not involved in this element of the process. This element will have been undertaken by Officers as applicable.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

I continue to believe that In-house Foster Carers provide better value for money and with increased numbers will provide increased choice and suitability of placement. However, continued monitoring regarding the success of the recruitment position and its impact against budget is required.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

N/A – Progress Report

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

Overview of progress reviewed on a monthly basis with Officer.

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Not involved in this element of the process. This element will have been undertaken by Officers.

9. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Increasing the the number of in-house Foster Carers, is one of a number of initiatives I believe is required manage costs more effectively by providing a range of placements in-house to most suit our young people's needs. Recruitment and other related initiatives impact upon each other and only progress on all will help us deliver the programme effectively.

10. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Progress report – existing initiative.

AUTHOR

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None