

MINUTES of a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** held on 20 February 2018 at County Hall, Matlock

PRESENT

Councillor A Dale (in the Chair)

Councillor J Patten.

Officers in attendance – J Aitman, N Amey, M Halliwell, R James, S Mehta, L Montgomery, J Murray, G Roe, B Sharif, L Watt and M Wilton

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Coyle, B Lewis and R Flatley; and H Moxon, A Noble and J Parfremment.

1/18 **MINUTES RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

2/18 **PERFORMANCE MEASURES – HEADLINE REPORT**

A report was received which provided details of how Derbyshire had performed in Key Performance Indicators for Children in Care at the end of December 2017. Indicators that were RAG rated as areas of concern or working well in the Corporate Parenting Board data tables had been included. Additional indicators were detailed in the Corporate Parenting Board data tables. A table providing details of the number of times children in care have received late visits in the previous 12 months was provided at the end of the briefing note.

It was agreed that further work was required with Barnados in order to increase the percentage of completed care leavers 'data records.

RESOLVED to note the information contained in the report.

3/18 **FOSTERING AND ADOPTION PANELS**

Information was provide to the Committee on the functioning, management and impact of both the Fostering and Adoption Panels and their role in supporting Derbyshire to provide an effective Fostering and Adoption agency.

The information was taken from the current annual Ofsted dataset and gathered from Frameworki, via Management Information and Fostering Panel minutes.

The Central Fostering Panel met fortnightly, with extra panels arranged if required. All the Foster Panel members have extensive knowledge or experience of the fostering process and of the issues of children in care and have an annual appraisal which addressed any areas for development. There

are two Elected Members who regularly contribute to the panel. The Panel's role was required to ensure that quality assurance was undertaken and that it was robust and addressed risk within the fostering context. Any concerns and/or trends both positive and negative were then fed back to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The annual Fostering Panel Activity from 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017 was detailed and included the numbers of cases presented, adopters approved, new applications, discussions regarding new applications under Regulation 24, and reviews. The professional advisor ensured that the Agency Decision Maker, who is Head of Service was made aware of panel issues, concerns and good practice. Details of responses from Foster Panel Evaluation Form for Applicants and Social Workers were contained within the report.

The Adoption Panel follows the legislation that underpinned the Adoption Service and was aware of the importance of providing stable, secure adoptive families for children who were unable to remain with their family of origin and for whom adoption was judged to provide the best alternative to secure their long-term well-being. The Panel made recommendations on the suitability of prospective adoptive applicants to adopt; the care plan of adoption for a child – when a child has been relinquished by birth parent(s); and whether a child should be placed for adoption with identified adopters. Derbyshire County Council Adoption Panel meets at least monthly and the Independent Chair has experience of being adopted. There are 15 members on the central list and all have an annual appraisal which addressed any area for development.

The annual Adoption Panel Activity from 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017 was detailed and included the numbers of Panels, the adoption applications approved and children matched with adopters, together with resignations, de-registering and reviews. All Social Workers and Adopters were invited to complete feedback and this information was provided in table format. It was noted that the Regional position might have an impact on the Panels.

RESOLVED to note the report.

4/18 FOSTERING SERVICE QUARTERLY RETURN

The purpose of the report was to fulfil obligations as laid down in the Fostering National Minimum Standards (April 2011), to present comparative performance data on the service to Cabinet, to present written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months and to monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to ensure that the service was effective and was achieving good outcomes for children.

At the end of Quarter 3, 2017-18, there were 712 children in care, looked after by Derbyshire County Council, which was an increase of 82 children since the end of the last financial year.

Derbyshire County Council's (DCC) foster carers account for 65% of the total looked after population and carers working for an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) account for 7%.

The County Council continued to experience resignations which slightly outstripped approvals, with 34 carers approved since April 2017 and 38 resignations. Projected rates from current figures suggested 45 approvals and 50 resignations by the year end. This would bring approval figures up to the 2013 level and a resignation rate of 12% which was 1% lower than the revised Fostering Network UK national average of 13%. Although the balance of DCC fostering placements versus IFAs remains strong compared to other Local Authority's, since April 2017 we have recently lost 3 carers transferring to IFAs which reinforced both our need to improve practice across services to retain such carers where possible but also to have a strong offer from DCC to be as competitive as possible.

Over the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017, there was an increase in the number of enquiries to become foster carers compared to the same period last year; 423 enquiries, compared to 400. These led to 86 initial visits, the same as in the period 1 April to 31 December 2016; and 13 deferrals and 189 NFA.

In September and November Talk Fostering Events were held at County Hall and 16 other events programmed. Talks have also been delivered to the Police and Adult Education Service. Banners have also been put up in prominent locations throughout the county and promoted fostering through Christmas Tree festivals. Efforts were being strengthened to clearly communicate the reasons for, and benefits of, fostering for a Local Authority rather than an IFA.

Since the implementation of the Staying Put initiative where a carer continues to provide accommodation for the young person they look after, once they become a care leaver, Derbyshire County Council has seen a high number of young people choosing to remain with their Staying Put carer. However this did limit the carer's ability to provide additional placements and was of particular concern with carers who were skilled in looking after older or teenage children.

Phase 1 of the Fostering Skills Allowance was introduced on 1 April 2017 and brought Derbyshire County Council in line with recommendations from the Fostering Network and fostering payments schemes in other neighbouring and peer Local Authorities. Phase 2 involved the review of all fostering payments and allowances, including the link care scheme. The work was almost complete and proposals would be put to the Senior Management Team.

At the end of the 2017/18 third quarter the number of children placed with IFA carers has decreased from 168 to 164. There were currently 72 children placed with IFA's in sibling groups, the 100 mainstream placed children would be 10 years or over and 6 young people have been in the same IFA placement for 5 years or longer. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children placed with IFA's has dropped to 7 less than the start of the year.

RESOLVED to note the report.

5/18 FOSTER CARERS FEEDBACK AND ITS IMPACT

The range of on the range of feedback received from foster carers, and its impact in informing actions, already underway and planned, to improve how Derbyshire supports foster carers to provide great quality and sufficient foster homes which enables Derbyshire children in care to 'be the best they can be' was reported.

The annual Fostering Survey was completed by one hundred and eighteen carers, which represented the largest single response from foster carers since the 2014 survey.

The outstanding points were:-

- that the majority of carers 'want' to care and it fulfilled a long standing aim
- Fewer carers were in paid work outside the home, and the ones that did were evenly split between full and part time
- The majority of carers felt their assessment was processed very well
- The level of satisfaction with Derbyshire's fostering service in 2017 was 76%, but only 52% of carers felt valued
- Carers felt their views were listened to most by their worker, then by their team, then by the authority. 38% of carers 'strongly agreed' that their child's social worker was responsive, professional, understanding and supportive, an increase of 8%
- One third of carers who responded currently are without a placement
- The number of carers surveyed who would consider moving to another agency now has risen by 12%.
- Nearly all our carers have attended at least one training course this year, however there was still an ongoing issue of accessing training due to distance and working time
- A quarter of carers have accessed services supplied by Foster Talk
- The Leisure Card scheme was the most popular of the additional services available to support and maintain foster placements
- Regular recognition of the role played by carer's children should be continued

- Over half our carers felt the service could be improved, and there has been a noticeable increase, in the number of carers who feel that fees and allowances were now a significant element in moving the service forward.
- Most carers felt the changes around the Fostering Skills Allowance had been made clear to them and two-thirds were currently unaffected by the changes.

RESOLVED to note the report.

6/18 ADOPTION SERVICE TWICE YEARLY RETURNS

To fulfil obligations as laid down in the Adoption National Minimum Standards, it was necessary to present comparative performance data on the service. Information was taken from the quarterly ALB dataset and Ofsted reports, gathered from Frameworki via Management Information and Panel.

The number of looked after children ceasing to be looked after due to adoption has fallen nationally and in the financial year 2016/17 the number has fallen by a further 8% to 4,350. These figures reflected an ongoing trend, observed from the quarterly returns collected by the Adoption Leadership Board, which has noted that the number of decisions made by Agency Decision Makers (ADM's) and numbers of placement orders has shown a gradual but constant decrease. Derbyshire was at the higher end of the scale with a drop of 36%.

During the financial year 2016/17, 43 children had been adopted, indicating a gradual slowdown of children coming into care and identifying children who might be harder to place, to become a priority rather than wait longer than was necessary. This downturn in the number of children adopted was in line with national data. As of 30 September 2017, 25 children had been adopted of which 7 were aged 5 years and above, which reflected the rise in younger children being admitted into care. Three children had been adopted by Voluntary Adoption Agencies and one by adopters from another local authority.

There were two key indicators which described the timeliness of adoption – (A1) Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) and (A2) average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days). Between 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2017 A1 days were 487 and A2 218 days.

In line with trends seen in the ALB scorecard data, Derbyshire County Council's Adoption Service has experienced fewer adoption enquiries over the last year, however there was a marked increase in the number of Special Guardianship Order's across the United Kingdom and Derbyshire County

Council has followed this trend. In the past two years, the number of Placement Order's being made by the courts has dropped by 25% and, as a result, a significant decrease in children with a plan for adoption. In Derbyshire, there were 27% fewer adoption in 2015/16, leading to 26% fewer as of year-end 2016/17 and 50% fewer as of 30 September 2017.

Over the past 12 months there has been an increase in the number of children presented to PAM, as the number of children aged 0 – 4, coming into care has gradually begun to increase. The need for robustness has also increased as the needs of the children with an adoption plan has increased.

In the financial year 2016/17, the number of enquiries dropped, as did enquiries across the United Kingdom, to 164, however the number of adopters increased to 67, which was partially due to an overspill of candidates from the previous year. As of the 30 September 2017, there had been 85 enquiries, leading to 16 approvals. Where families were approved, the numbers of those in the matching process had begun to decline; 37 in the financial year 2015/16 dropping to 31 waiting to be match in 2016/17. As of September 30th 2017, the number of families approved, within the matching process, has risen to 33.

There had been a high demand with regard to access to Derbyshire County Council's Adoption Support Services, not just from adoptive parents and adoptive children, but also, from birth family and adopted adults, including requests to view records. The number of Letterbox exchanges as of 30 September 2017 has reached 1052.

The number of complaints the adoption service received remained very low, and in this financial year to date, there has been one referral to the IRM and as of 30 September, two disruptions, which reflected thorough matching processes and effective support.

In the financial year 2016/17, the authority made available 3 adoption placements from 2 household, generating £46,667. As of 30 September 2017, the authority made one placement in Derbyshire for 2 children from Derby City with a financial gain of £28,667 for the first 2/3 with the third 1/3 due on Adoption Order. The County Council's Adoption Service had 16 external placements; 8 with other local authorities and 8 with voluntary organisations, at a total cost of £103,439 with a projected additional cost of £70,018 in the next quarter. In line with national trends, the increase in external placements could be seen to be as a result of the impact of increasing numbers of sibling groups not only coming into care, but waiting for adoption.

Fostering for Adoption (FfA) was a relatively new initiative whereby children who have an adoption plan but do not yet have a Placement Order can be placed with the families who might adopt them before the court proceedings have been concluded. In the financial year 2016/17, there were 18 children

placed under FfA, 1 of which was returned home to birth mother and at 30 September 2017, there were 8 households approved for FfA placements with the children subsequently placed. Whilst the authority was actively engaging in seeking Fostering for Adoption placements, a significant number of adoptions were made each year by existing foster carers, who choose to make a permanent commitment to the child, or children, they care for.

RESOLVED to note the report.

7/18 COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE The Committee was updated on the Communications Teams activity to promote fostering and adoption during the period 1 September 2017 to 31 January 2018, which included National Adoption Week and Talk Fostering events.

The number of approvals for new adoptive parents and foster carers nationally was in decline, while the number of looked after children was at its highest level for 20 years. The Adoption Leadership Board and the Fostering Network have understandably emphasised the need for a greater focus on recruitment of carers, particularly for harder to place children.

The communications activity for fostering and adoption was based on agreed strategies. The report detailed the key campaigns and events, all of which were supported by media releases to Derbyshire media outlets, posts on social media and where appropriate national promotional material was used. It was noted that between 8 and 30 January 2018 there were 3,652 visits to the Talk fostering events page on the County Council's website, which came via the social media posts and tweets.

Other activity focused on the Leader's blog; County Council homepage banners; Council Tax leaflets; Derbyshire Now; a two-week Peak FM radio advertising campaign to promote fostering; fostering advertising in Primary Times which was distributed to 35,000 Derbyshire households; local newspaper advertising of events; advertisement posters at two Derbyshire supermarkets; advert in a Chesterfield FC Community Trust information folder and Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Trust staff handbook; on a pilot basis banners have been erected at the Cavendish Fields Playing Fields and Matlock Junior under 7's have a sponsored kit; and the adoption service was to advertise in the 2018 edition of the Chesterfield and District Health and Community guide.

Internal advertising messages were relayed to County Council staff via Our Derbyshire and staff bulletins and pay slips. Derbyshire Constabulary has produced a fostering feature for their staff communications channels. Promotional information on Talk Fostering events has also been sent to communication departments in Derbyshire District and Borough Councils and health agencies.

A short film has been produced by Rachel Vine of Donut Creative Arts Services (DCAS) for use on the DCC website and social media channels. The film promotes essential qualities for the best possible foster care environment and would be shown at Talk Fostering events. A discussion to develop a promotional film for adoption was to take place in February.

Communications has also been involved in redesigning and reprinting leaflets; Email signatures; bags; display boards and Banners. Upcoming activity and work would revolve around Raising the Profile of Adoption; Refreshing Strategies; developing a clear evaluation process to show how effective the communication activity was and to access how to reach younger potential adoptive parents. Communication opportunities would also be taken at the Talk Fostering events, the Fostering Conference on 15 March 2018, for fleet livery, during LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week; Foster Care fortnight; national Adoption week; at Local Sports Clubs and banners.

Finally the value of word of mouth recommendations could not be understated and the role current adopters and foster carers play in 'spreading the word' was a vital recruiting tool. The role of all fostering and adoption staff, particularly the recruitment teams, in helping to create unofficial 'ambassadors' for the services was vital.

The County Council's Communications team would continue to monitor social media sharing of posts and research how other local authorities approached advertising fostering and adoption. It was noted that advertising needed to be engaging to attract prospective fosterers and adopters, however currently the County Council's website appeared too business like and information on the process appeared challenging to access. The County Council was in the process of upgrading its website and this should be on stream soon.

RESOLVED to note the Communications activity for fostering and adoption.

8/18 VIRTUAL SCHOOL MONTHLY DATABOOK One of the key tasks of the Virtual School was to monitor all children in care from birth to Year 13, and the monthly databook, produced by the Virtual School, provided information on a range of statistics. The headlines for children in care as at 31 January 2018 were reported and the full version of the data book was attached to the report.

There were 719 children and young people aged 0-18 in care, and 434 attended school in 29 different local authorities. 155 children in care were within early years and 189 were within the primary age range – 131 were within county schools and 58 in out of county schools. Primary children attended a total of 134 schools, 84 of which were Derbyshire schools and 50 were out of county

schools. 245 children in care were within the secondary age range, and 161 were in county schools, 82 in out of county schools and 2 had no school place. Secondary children attended a total of 125 schools, 54 of which were Derbyshire schools and 71 out of county schools. 130 children in care were post 16. 226 attended good or better Derbyshire schools and settings, and 122 attended good or better out of county schools and settings. Of the 30 eligible two year olds as at Spring term 2018, 19/30 were accessing provision 12/19 in Derbyshire settings and 7/19 in out of county settings, and of the 40 three and four year old cohort, 35/40 were accessing provision – 24/35 in Derbyshire settings and 11/35 in out of county settings. There was a high level of SEN, with 65/189 of the primary aged children, 139/245 of the secondary aged children and 58/130 Post 16 having an EHCP or SEN. 33 children in care were unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The information has improved access to data enabling the Virtual School Team to identify issues and implement actions and strategies before they escalate. The Virtual School has begun Challenge meetings with Schools where required and these are proving beneficial to both parties.

As a result of regular Virtual School Heads meetings, a new Virtual School Data Manager meeting schedule was being established to discuss and share data and good practice.

It was noted that the County Council's Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – People was undertaking a review on school exclusions.

Councillor Dale requested a fostering stock take for the next meeting.

RESOLVED to note the report.

9/18 DERBYSHIRE BELIEVES IN ME AWARDS

Derbyshire County Council wanted to recognise exceptional children for achievements they have made whilst being in its care or part of the fostering family. Nominations were invited for all children in care or in a fostering family who were now currently in reception year at school up to and including those who finished year 11 in July 2017 and therefore had their GCSE results in August 2017.

The Award event would take place on Friday 9 March 2018.