

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

24 July 2012

**REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN &
YOUNGER ADULTS AND THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**

FOSTERING FOR DERBYSHIRE – (Young People)

1. **Purpose of the Report**

To seek Cabinet approval for a dedicated public relations officer and promotional budget to deliver high profile fostering and adoption recruitment drives to encourage local people to provide local homes for local children.

2. **Information and Analysis**

Nationally there is a shortfall of around 8,500 foster carers. Derbyshire – like many councils up and down the country – is finding it hard to keep up with growing demand and provide sufficient local homes for children in our care. It means we continue to be reliant on expensive private agency placements and struggle to recruit sufficient new foster carers in an increasingly competitive market.

Derbyshire County Council needs to recruit, train and support sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of the 700 children in our care. Derbyshire has 428 approved foster carers. Although Derbyshire has a relatively high proportion of children cared for by its own carers – 62.1% of placements are with authority carers compared to 49.4% nationally (source: Cipfa benchmarking stats), we are currently short of at least 80 carers to meet all our placement needs.

A shortage of foster carers on this scale creates significant financial and other pressures on the council because:

- we have to buy in more expensive foster care from independent providers
- it limits the placement options available for children in our care
- children may have to be placed a long way from their home area
- it reduces the cash we have available for preventative services which may stop children entering the care system in the first place.

We currently spend over £3.3m a year on 80 care placements from the independent sector. Each private placement costs around an extra £33,000 a year more than the council's own foster placement arrangements.

Over the last four years, the council has stepped up its recruitment activity with innovative, multi-channelled publicity campaigns – including television advertising. The campaigns have directly resulted in the recruitment of at least 40 additional foster carers saving the council up to £1.32m on our private fostering agency bill.

We have also increased the number of enquiries to Call Derbyshire and our fostering team to an average of 60 a month. The numbers of those who go on to become approved carers remains at around 13% (national average figure 10%).

As well as the need to recruit new foster carers – particularly to provide homes for mainstream teenagers and respite care for disabled children – we also need to do all we can to retain our existing foster carers. We currently offer:

- **Full training** – including a three-day 'Skills to Foster' course
- **Ongoing training and equipment** – including a laptop and free broadband
- **Fees and allowances** – from £136 to £468 a week – with extra cash for holidays, birthdays and annual bonuses
- **A named social worker** – to provide regular and flexible support
- **Respite breaks**
- **Free access to leisure and swimming facilities** – for the whole family

- **A fostering mentor support scheme** – where experienced foster carers are on hand to offer help and advice.
- **Membership of the council's Workforce Extra discount shopping scheme**
- **A long service foster carer awards event**
- **Foster family and career events**

The recent OfSTED inspection of our fostering service which judged the service to be good also highlighted an “effective” recruitment strategy. However, the number of children entering into our care continues to rise. We need to further step up our recruitment activity in a bid to offset the effects of an increasingly competitive environment and encourage even more people to foster for Derbyshire. It is proposed, therefore, to appoint a temporary Promotions Officer, Grade 11 - £37,133 to £40,791 including on-costs – for a two year fixed term contract.

The key aims of the post will be to:

- secure a net increase of 20 Derbyshire foster carers over two years to produce a net saving of £660,000 in private agency fees
- increase the number of enquiries and expressions of interest from prospective Derbyshire carers
- ensure fostering for Derbyshire County Council is the first and most popular choice for prospective carers.

To achieve the best possible results, it is recommended that an additional £200,000 budget is allocated to make full use of all marketing and promotional opportunities over the 24 month campaign. Experience has shown that this and more will be easily recouped over the period from the savings made in payments to private fostering agencies.

It is suggested that regular monitoring and evaluation reports be presented to Cabinet/Cabinet Member at six monthly intervals throughout the campaign.

A review of all business service processes in relation to fostering and adoption services is currently underway with the aim of providing a more

effective and efficient service. This may result in a further paper being brought to Members in the future.

3. **Financial Considerations**

The cost of the proposed post is £40,000 assuming an appointment mid-scale. The table below shows the anticipated cashflows resulting from this appointment including the savings from avoiding agency fees.

It has been assumed that 10 carers will be recruited evenly in each of the two years and that the carers will only provide care 6 months after recruitment. Each carer is assumed to save the council £33,000 pa in fees to external carers.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 on
Costs				
Marketing post	40,000	40,000	0	0
Marketing activity	100,000	100,000	0	0
Total Costs	140,000	140,000	0	0
Savings in avoided fees	57,750	363,000	635,250	660,000
Net savings/(cost)	(82,250)	223,000	635,250	660,000
Cumulative savings	(82,250)	140,750	776,000	1,436,000

It is proposed that an earmarked reserve is created to fund the dedicated public relations officer post and the associated marketing and promotion budget from 2011/2012 CAYA underspend.

4. **Human Resources Considerations**

The post will be managed by and be located within the council's Public Relations Division. A copy of the Promotions Officer Grade 11 job profile is attached as Appendix A.

4. **Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and environmental, health, legal, property and transport considerations.

5. **Key Decision**

No

6. **Officer Recommendations**

- i) That Cabinet approves the appointment of a Promotions Officer for a two year fixed term contract.
- ii) That £200,000 be set aside to deliver high profile fostering and adoption recruitment activity and campaigns.
- iii) That Cabinet receives regular monitoring and evaluation reports.

JOB PROFILE

Job Title:	Promotions Officer	Ref: DCC/11
Department:	Chief Executive's Office	
Section:	Public Relations	
Job Family:	Public Relations	Job grade: 11

Purpose of this role:

- To promote, protect and enhance the council's reputation.
- To create better public awareness and understanding of the council's policies, activities and achievements.
- To research, plan, implement and evaluate major communications campaigns.
- To assist in the production of the council's key corporate publications and websites.

Key relationships:

Line managed by Communications Manager.

- Advise and brief elected members and council officers up to Chief Officer level on public relations matters.
- Liaise with senior representatives of partner organisations e.g. NHS and other councils
- Collaborate with a wide range of external stakeholders including local and national media, businesses and voluntary sector organisations.

Key result areas include:

- Contribute to the research and production of effective strategies for major corporate communications campaigns to meet the council's business priorities.
- Develop, plan and manage specific communications programmes working across a range of service areas.
- Implement internal and external campaigns using a wide range of techniques including: advertising, print, direct mail, media, websites and social media, marketing, presentations and road shows.
- Analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of communications campaigns and produce reports.
- Keep abreast of current thinking and developments in communications and public relations practice.
- Build and sustain positive relationships with the media and produce material for local and national print and broadcast media.

- Work flexibly across all PR disciplines including media, campaigns, internal communications, publications and digital communications.
- Supervise, motivate and coordinate support staff on project work providing clear organisation, direction and development.

General Responsibilities:

People Management

On specific projects and campaigns the post holder will be expected to supervise, motivate and organise other members of the team.

Equality and Diversity

To actively support the council's Equality and Human Rights policy.

Health and Safety

Ensure compliance with authority's Health & Safety policy/procedures and any resources the post is responsibility for.

Risk Management

Identify opportunities and risks associated with the service and escalate/report to management.