

Fostering Recruitment Update

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Cabinet Member: Frances Nicholson

Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on fostering recruitment activity. A full report was provided to Scrutiny Committee in December 2016. Refer to Section 6 below.
- 1.2. Increasing local care placements remains a key service priority in the Children and Young People's Plan 2016 – 2019 linking directly to Somerset's Sufficiency Action Plan.
- 1.3. The rolling programme of pro-active recruitment activity continues with the support of the Communications Team.
- 1.4. The recruitment of sufficient numbers of foster carers for children in care is a rising challenge both locally and nationally. This is alongside a national rise in the number of children in care although Somerset has been able to hold this number steady at approximately 475 children for a period of 12 months. This is due to increased scrutiny in relation to care planning and support provided to families to enable them to continue to care for children at home.
- 1.5. The lack of sufficient numbers of foster placements is a significant pressure within the service and it affects the delivery of appropriate plans for children. It remains the case that local authorities across the country are at times forced to place children, particularly older children, in placements which may not meet their assessed need, for example, children may be placed in residential provision or in placements out of county due to insufficient fostering provision particularly for those children with more complex needs.
- 1.6. Performance information for 2016/17 evidences a continued increased use of in-house fostering provision despite an overall net loss of foster carers. The main reasons for foster carers leaving the service is due to permanence being achieved for children via alternative legal routes, retirement, ill health and family commitments.

2. Issues for consideration/ recommendations

- 2.1. As per the December 2016 Report to Scrutiny, a review of recruitment activity has been undertaken and is being implemented. Details of ongoing recruitment activity can be found via the service's website www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk or via Facebook (Fostering in Somerset) and Twitter (@fostersomerset).

- 2.2. The service has been consulting with foster carers on the support offer available to them to ensure that this is competitive and good enough to attract and retain foster carers with the right skills and experience. This work has included a comparison exercise with other local authorities and a review of the Foster Carer's Progression Scheme and the fees and allowances available to foster carers. The work has taken into account the changing economic climate, the need to attract younger families who can offer longevity in addition to families who may be in a more secure position and are able to be more flexible as their own families have left home. This piece of work will be completed by the end of June 2017 and presented to cabinet thereafter.

3. Background

3.1. Recruitment Activity

- 3.2. The priority areas for recruitment activity continue to be:

- People who can foster children aged 10 and over;
- People who can care for children with disabilities;
- People who can foster sibling groups to keep them together;
- People with the skills to support young people with complex needs who need additional support to make positive steps in their lives.

- 3.3. Recruitment activity is now more 'broad brush' aimed at prospective carers who may be able to care for children of all ages due to the shortage of carers for all ages.

- 3.4. Innovative and energetic recruitment campaigns continue to run alongside national events such as Fostering Fortnight. The service maintains a high profile in the local media and on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, using interactive communications which have included foster carers in blogs and tweets and live web chats.

- 3.5. Recent recruitment activity has included a flash mob choir in Taunton town centre in March 2017 and the 'Five Peaks Challenge'. Fostering Fortnight in May 2017 included the following:

- **'Fostering Firsts'** themed event in Taunton town centre:

- Visual campaign surrounding 'fostering firsts' - images and real stories about the childhood milestones that some children do not get to experience without the dedication and love of a foster carer e.g. baking biscuits together, going to the seaside, birthday parties etc.
- Stall with heart-shaped biscuits. Leafleting and chatting to public about fostering.

- Banner displayed in Taunton town centre, outside the Tourist Information Office.
- **‘Fostering Firsts’** intensive social media campaign including a blog from a ‘grown up’ foster child about his experiences. 7,858 views, 287 link clicks, 111 likes and shares.
- **‘Fostering Firsts Video’** 13,392 reach 7,200 views, 217 reactions, likes and shares. After posting, average monthly web traffic to www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk spiked by 166% on average sessions.
- **‘Five Peaks Challenge’ event** – Hike in Somerset raising awareness of the need for Foster Carers in Somerset and money for the Somerset Foster Carer Association. Positive reaction to social media coverage. Several posts on Facebook – highest post reach per post 3857, 90 likes and shares. Tweets gained 2020 impressions and 130 engagements.
- Tweet endorsed by celebrity racehorse trainer Paul Nichols – 10,041 impressions 163 engagements.
- Fostering Friday on Twitter 19th May – 12 Tweets, 12,009 impressions, 101 engagements.
- Coverage of SCC launching FCF2017 and dates of upcoming Fostering and Adoption Information Events in Local Reach Magazine, Street.
- Additional fostering information event in Street 16th May – Wessex Hotel 10 people attended.
- Fostering stall at Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury Tesco 19th and 20th May.
- Articles in Our Somerset

Fostering Fortnight as a national event became a far more low profile event than in previous years due to the general election.

- 3.6. The Recruitment Team continues to run successful monthly information sessions for both prospective foster carers and adopters supported by Costa Coffee. In recent months these have been targeted at areas such as Shepton Mallet where foster carer numbers are lower than would be expected.
- 3.7. Recruitment and Retention Performance
- 3.8. The number of enquiries received for fostering in 2016/17 was the lowest for 6 years (351). The number of approvals in 2016/17 was also lower than in

previous years (24). This is also the experience of neighbouring local authorities.

- 3.9. In the year to date 7 new fostering households have been approved with 29 assessments of prospective carers ongoing at various stages.
- 3.10. Currently the service has 253 approved households in total. Of this cohort approximately 160 households have an approval range which would include 10 years olds but may only go up to age 11 or 12. There are 17 households approved as connected persons with a further 11 approved temporarily and being assessed for either full approval or a Special Guardianship Order.
- 3.11. During 2016 - 17, 62 households including 26 connected persons ceased fostering. This is compared to 71 in 2015 - 16. The majority of connected persons arrangements transfer to Special Guardianship Orders and therefore this is a positive outcome for children as they cease to become looked after and are cared for within their extended family.
- 3.12. De-registration numbers remain high and represent a net loss of fostering households. The reasons for deregistration remain various (See Appendix 1). For a number of carers this is because permanence has been secured for the children placed with them. For example, connected persons who go on to make alternative legal arrangements to secure the child placed with them or foster carers who become special guardians or adopt the children in their care. The other main reason is due to changes in the foster carer's family circumstances. Only 4 carers gave dissatisfaction with the service as a reason for deregistration and no carers have left the service to transfer to another fostering agency.
- 3.13. Despite a net loss of in-house carers in 2016/17 the service has been able to not only maintain but increase the number of in-house placements made since 1st April 2016 and more children from our target group have been placed in-house (see Appendices 2 and 3). This demonstrates that despite a high number of de-registrations, foster carers with the most to offer have been recruited, supported and retained from our target groups. The service works hard to deliver quality and quantity and maintain a focus on the risks this can present in the face of the sufficiency challenge.
- 3.14. The service continues to provide a good offer of support to foster carers which includes regular contact with their Supervising Social Worker, a varied training programme which enables foster carers to train alongside social workers and other professionals, a mentoring scheme and a fee based progression scheme which was introduced in 2014. The introduction of Placement Support Meetings has been a positive development which is embedded and 75% of fragile placements have been supported to continue via these meetings.

4. Consultations undertaken

None

5. Implications

5.1. The implications of not having sufficient in house foster placements are:

- Children may be placed at a distance from their families and communities making contact and any plans to return children to their families successfully more challenging;
- Children may have to change education provision at critical times in their education provision;
- Older children may be placed in a children's home when this is not their assessed need;
- Placement stability is more difficult to monitor and support can be more difficult to facilitate;
- Increased financial cost to the local authority.

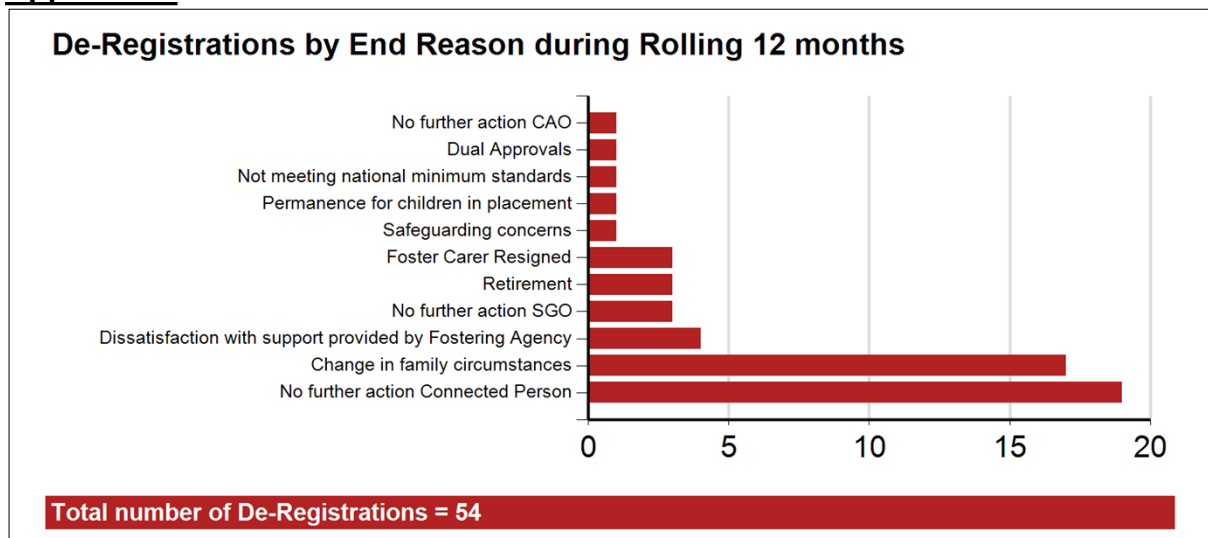
6. Background papers



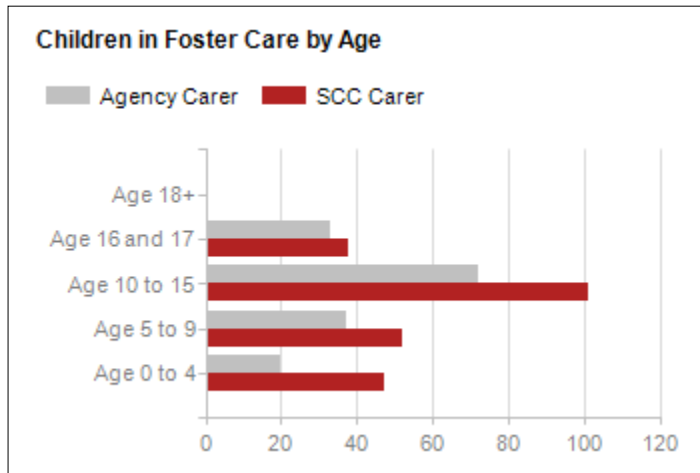
Fostering
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Appendices

Appendix 1



Appendix 2



Total number in SCC placements = 215

Total number in agency placements = 156

Appendix 3

Agency Foster Placements			
Percentage 2014/15	Percentage 2015/16	Percentage 2016/17	Average of CIPFA Authorities
42.42%	40.13%	36.12%	29%

In House Foster Placements			
Percentage 2014/15	Percentage 2015/16	Percentage 2016/17	Average of CIPFA Authorities
57.58%	59.87%	63.88%	71%