

Cabinet – 16 March 2016

Fostering Service Annual Report 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 and addendum Fostering Service Report to cover April to September 2015

Portfolio: Councillor Eddie Hughes

Related portfolios: N/A

Service: Fostering Service – Specialist Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Fostering Service annual report, found at **Appendix 1**, details the progress of the Fostering Service for the period April 2014 to March 2015. Under the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, which came into effect on 1 April 2011, the Fostering Service must provide the executive side of the Council written reports on the activities of the Fostering Service.

The report should have been submitted towards the latter part of 2015. However, during this time, the activity of the fostering panel increased by 40% with an additional two panels a month having to be facilitated. This had the impact of reducing the capacity of the panel advisor to complete the annual report in the required timescale. In order to provide members with a more up to date report on progress, a supplementary report is also provided which covers the period 1 April 2015 to the 30 September 2015.

- 1.2 The Fostering Service was inspected by Ofsted in October 2010 and the judgement awarded was good.
- 1.3 There has been a significant fall in the numbers of enquiries however the conversion rate has been greater. This would suggest the information provided has been clearer.
- 1.4 The assessment of family and friends carers has continued to be commissioned, managed and quality assured by the senior practitioner in the Friends and Families team and team manager. The re-structure means that the process will now be managed by the Recruitment & Assessment Team. These

assessments will continue to be commissioned out, although there are plans to assess some of these carers within the Fostering Service in the future.

- 1.5 The Black Country Skills to Foster Training Consortium was re – established in January 2014, increasing the opportunities for applicants to be trained at a variety of times and venues at their convenience. There is now at least 1 Skills to Foster course run each month across the consortium (except August and December), with the opportunity for each local authority to nominate 1 household (2 people) to a course being run by the host authority
- 1.6 We have trained more people in skills to foster over the last year, than any other year.
- 1.7 Short term break carers have continued to be recruited alongside our mainstream carers to meet the specific needs of disabled children.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the good progress made during this period, and also the additional report covering April – September 2015.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 The report found at **Appendix 1** summarises the work of Walsall Children's Services Fostering Service from April 2014 to March 2015.
- 3.2 The management, staff and foster carers demonstrate a commitment to the development of the service and providing good quality of care to Looked After Children. The service is ready to implement its new structure. The most significant change is merging Family and Friends into the remaining two teams.

There are significant strengths in the service and considerable progress has been made in service delivery. Staff and foster carers highly value the Walsall Fostering Service and are well motivated and committed to providing good quality care to children and young people.

- 3.2 Recruitment foster carers' A Foster Care Recruitment Working Party 'was formed in 2014. It is attended by members of Central Communications, the Recruitment & Assessment Team and foster carers. The Team Manager, in association with Central Communications and the working party coordinates our recruitment events
- 3.3 In December 2012 we opened a "Fostering in Walsall" face book page and a Twitter account. Currently 228 people "like" the face book page and we have 182 twitter followers.
- 3.4 Walsall Fostering Service has an effective partnership with Walsall Foster Carers Association (FCA). Activity days are arranged for children and carers; they also attend events to recruit more foster carers.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 Key Council priorities emerging from the report relate primarily to ensuring that more children are placed in local internal foster placements and the systematic reduction in the use of high cost Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements.
- 4.2 The priority will be met through the effective recruitment and retention of foster carers who are able to meet the diverse range of needs and outcomes of children cared for by the local authority.
- 4.3 Ensuring Walsall foster carers are appropriately supported, trained and skill matched to the right children is central to achieving the council priorities in terms of quality care and value for money.

Specific council priorities are: Improve lives and life chances for everyone who lives and works in the Borough of Walsall and in so doing-

Minimise the help that residents need from the state.

Improving Safeguarding, Learning and the Life Chances for Children and Young People, raising aspirations – Children in care are placed in safe and caring foster homes with skilled and experienced foster carers who promote Children's life chances through support with education, health, leisure and recreation. Children are supported to acquire life skills to equip them for adulthood. Foster carers are provided with delegated authority, which ensures that children in care are afforded the same aspirations and opportunities as their peers who are not in care.

Create a modern, dynamic and efficient workforce designed around what Residents need via the fostering service recruitment campaign local people are being encouraged to become foster carers for Walsall children. All foster carers are provided with a comprehensive training programme, to safeguard children and to prepare them for adulthood.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 The risk emerging from the Fostering Service report (Appendix 1) that will require effective management are ensuring that more children are placed in local foster placements. Measures to respond positively to these needs and risk areas are integral to the Fostering Service action plan.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The financial implications for the council for managing effective outcomes for children and the Fostering Service are considered during the annual budget setting process and are in line with the medium term financial plan. Cost reductions based on increasing the number of local foster placements and

decreasing the number of Independent Fostering Agency placements are considerable and subject to key priorities within a new children's Services operating model.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The annual Fostering Service Report meets the requirements of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 35) and Fostering Services: National Minimum standard 25.7

Regulation requires that the 'executive side of the agency' receive written reports on a quarterly basis on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service. Prior to this, reporting to Cabinet was undertaken as good practice.

8. Property implications

None

9. Health and wellbeing implications

None

10. Staffing implications

None

11. Equality implications

- 11.1 Continued improvements in securing local foster placements, placements for children from Black and ethnic minority communities, and for disabled children and their families, will ensure equality of access to services for all Walsall children who are Looked After by the local authority.

12. Consultation

- 12.1 This report has been informed by consultation and feedback from relevant stakeholders, fosters carers, children and young people, and panel members. The report is a public document, which can be accessed by anyone wishing to do so and will be available on the Council website.

Background papers

Annual Report (**Appendix 1**)

Author

Linda Franks

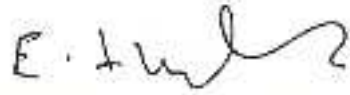
Professional Panel Advisor for Fostering and Adoption.

☎ 650834

✉ franksj@walsall.gov.uk

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Haley'.

David Haley
Executive Director
16 February 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Hughes'.

Councillor E Hughes
Portfolio holder
7 March 2016