

## Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers Task Group – Recommendations

Rec No	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	<p>That an end-to-end review of the foster care recruitment process is carried out by the Children's Services department, with a focus on those foster carers recruited in the preceding 12-24 month period. This review should address the range of topics raised in the report, including the consideration of the staffing resources available to respond to enquiries – within existing directorate resources for the forthcoming financial year.</p>	<p>Head of Service – Fostering Assistant Director – Children's</p>	<p>The end-to-end review of the foster care recruitment process is being completed as one of the Recruitment Hub workstreams, measuring timelines, quality of information shared, impact of each stage and outcomes from the enquiry.</p> <p>The existing questionnaire that is provided to all new foster carers is being reviewed and responses collated. This will form the basis of a short report the findings of which will be responded to and included within the Annual Fostering Report.</p> <p>The review will also include scrutiny of those foster carers ceasing to foster. A new set of KPIs have been developed which will track each step of the recruitment process and learning will be taken from this.</p> <p>A wider service review has been undertaken to ensure adequate resources are available to respond to enquiries and to provide support throughout the application process, this has included the creation of Graduate Development Officer, which was completed and approved in September 2022.</p> <p>January 2023</p>

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2	<p>That the Council's Fostering Marketing and Communications Strategy continue to be reviewed annually and strengthened where necessary. This should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensuring that the hybrid approach to marketing continues to address the potential myths around barriers to fostering by promoting that anyone aged over 21 can foster, including older people, and regardless of sexuality, gender, race, disability and other issues as set out in 4.12.</li> <li>b) Feedback from both current foster carers, and those who make an enquiry to foster but subsequently withdraw, is gathered used to shape the Marketing and Communications Strategy and recruitment process</li> <li>c) Appointing 'foster care champions' from within the existing pool of experienced foster carers to attend online and in-person events</li> <li>d) Continuing to keep the Fostering in St Helens website under regular review</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Service – Fostering</p> <p>Marketing and Communications Manager</p>	<p>The recommendation refers to the continued oversight of lead officers in ensuring that the Marketing and Communication Strategy continues to meet its objectives.</p> <p>A return to face-to-face recruitment events, in addition to those held virtually, have progressed. The Fostering Recruitment Hub Team have all engaged in a range of activity, presenting on-line, at events in different settings. Foster Care Champions are currently plotting out events that they can support and a calendar of events for 2023 is in development which will be shared with all Foster Carers and Local Authority colleagues.</p> <p>Planning events have been well supported by colleagues in Place Services, in particular Ways to Work and Markets. Supermarkets across the Borough have agreed to support recruitment events so the team will have a visible presence at busy periods.</p> <p>A new campaign has been launched highlighting all fostering opportunities...part-time, respite, mainstream and specialist, with stories and pictures of people from a range of backgrounds and ages which we hope will show how fostering is welcoming to all.</p>
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		<p>All feedback is being analysed. Work is underway to attach barcodes to promotion materials so we can track the impact of each approach/event.</p> <p>Two foster carers champions are now in place. Weekly meetings have been established and work is underway to develop these roles to recruit more champions.</p> <p>This recommendation should be considered in conjunction with recommendation 4.</p> <p>Information will continue to be collated as part of the continuous review of recruitment practise and used to inform the annual review of the Marketing and Recruitment Strategy or to implement immediate change to practise should that be required. This information is captured on a quarterly basis. The findings from this activity is that enquiries tend to be of a better quality from the website or word of mouth than those received via social media, in these instances we experience the largest cohort who do not respond to any attempts to contact.</p> <p>There is an existing cohort of foster carers who are actively involved in the recruitment and retention of foster carers, participating in fostering campaigns and acting as mentors for newly recruited foster carers.</p>
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			<p>This group will continue to be supported and developed. This remains a priority and foster carers continue to be sought to expand the group.</p> <p>The Fostering in St Helens website is a microsite to ensure it retains its own identity and branding. The service is currently being supported by the Assistant Director, Commercialisation to review the current website and user experience it is anticipated that this will be completed early January and launched as part of our St Helens based fostering week.</p> <p>March 2023</p>
3	<p>Opportunities be explored for ‘foster care champions’ to support those applicants going through the foster care assessment process.</p>	<p>Head of Service - Fostering</p>	<p>Volunteers will be sought to ‘match’ with new applicants and newly approved foster carers.</p> <p>This action has been completed all foster carers are offered the opportunity to be matched with an existing foster carer, for support and this includes connected carers. We have ‘recruited’ 2 foster care champions and our ambition is to increase this number further to a total of 4.</p> <p>Completed</p>

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4	That consideration be given to ensuring that the views of existing foster carers are regularly captured and, where appropriate, acted upon by the local authority, to ensure that the service continues to improve and to meet the needs both of foster carers and children and young people.	<p>Head of Service – Fostering</p> <p>Team Manager – Fostering</p>	<p>Alongside the annual feedback (which is collated and shared) feedback is also gathered from a range of sources including the FC Forum, FC support group, online questionnaires, Facebook, complaints and compliments. Actions identified will be agreed and prioritised in consultation with foster carers via the Foster Carers Forum, the Foster Carers Support Group and shared with Supervising Social Workers and Team Managers.</p> <p>This continues to be developed and has been extended to include collaboration with the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO).</p> <p>The newsletter has been relaunched to include 'You said we did' section. This will go out monthly and will provide regular updates on what action is being taken and what difference it has made.</p> <p>March 2023</p>
5	That the department explore the potential to appoint a remunerated Foster Carer Recruitment Co-ordinator from existing St Helens' foster carers, similar to the role in Liverpool City Council's foster carer recruitment service.	<p>Assistant Director – Children's Head of Service - Fostering</p> <p>Principal Officer HR</p>	<p>As part of the wider service review this role has been considered and given the needs of the service replaced with the creation of a Graduate Development Officer. This role will be additionally supported by the foster carer champions.</p> <p>Completed</p>

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6	<p>That in workplaces where caring is carried out professionally, for example in education, hospitals and other care settings, senior leaders, should be approached to promote fostering within their local networks / workplaces. In education, this would involve those with specific pastoral responsibilities.</p>	<p>Head of Service – Fostering</p> <p>Team Manager - Fostering</p>	<p>There have been a range of presentations and marketing events with schools, housing groups, voluntary sector and church groups. The CEX has also approached a number of partners who have all responded positively, these links and opportunities are being followed up.</p> <p>Details of all relevant providers within the borough continue to be collated. The response to the request for support so far has been overwhelmingly positive. The voluntary sector including faith groups have extended an invitation for officers to meet directly and to promote fostering on their own social media sites on a regular basis and has offered advertising and support.</p> <p>Further opportunities continue to be identified.</p> <p>Work has commenced with Saints Rugby Club, Haydock Park Racecourse and Future Glass who have all provided advertising opportunities. Saints have also provided Totally Wicked Stadium as a venue for our recruitments and celebration events.</p> <p>A presentation was delivered in December to the DSL forum and marketing materials shared.</p> <p>March 2023</p>
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7	That Elected Members of this authority be requested to promote fostering during their work in the community and online. To assist elected members to do this effectively, the Task Group would welcome introductory training on the how best to market key messages, including use of social media.	Head of Service – Fostering  Marketing and Communications Manager  Recruitment and Training Officer	Introductory training to be developed and offered initially to the task group with feedback sought before widening the offer to all elected members.  Provisional date to be identified in January in preparation for #FosterFest week.  March 2023
8	That collaboration opportunities with neighbouring authorities be explored to raise the profile of fostering and encourage effective recruitment.	Head of Service - Fostering	Work with LCR continues, we are currently exploring joint webinar opportunities.  Completed
9	To demonstrate how much we value the work of our foster carers, a strategy document be produced which sets to set out how recognition can be given, including a variety of ways in which the Council can recognise good service and nominations to the Honours List.	Head of Service - Fostering	Opportunities to access existing mechanisms to demonstrate appreciation continue be explored and will include nominations to the Honours List.  Foster Carer forum fed back their appreciation for time with the Mayor and the annual celebration event. Regular slots are being established with the Mayor and the celebration event will be held at the end of the St Helens focused recruitment week which will take place 26-31 January 2023.  A section in the newsletter is dedicated to key messages from the DCS & AD of CSC providing a regular opportunity to thank and celebrate.

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			<p>The workstream looking at retention of foster carers is leading on the development of a further idea with the support of the foster carer champions.</p> <p>December 2022</p>
10	<p>That within its annual review of the Foster Care Payment Guide, that the Council consider greater incentives that could impact upon the recruitment and retention of foster carers. This includes options being explored regarding remuneration for foster carers, and a cost-benefit analysis for a financial payment made to referrers when a new foster carer is approved.</p>	<p>Head of Service – Fostering</p> <p>Finance Manager</p>	<p>As part of the website refresh a section is being developed that highlights all the benefits of being a St Helens Foster Carer. The offer from Saints Rugby Team will also be part of this (they have offered tickets, meals, celebration at becoming a Foster Carer etc.)</p> <p>An initial review of the Foster Care Payment Guide has been completed and found that the current payments are favourable when compared to neighbouring Local Authorities. However, it is recognised that does not apply when compared to Independent Fostering Agencies.</p> <p>In recognition alternative incentives have been identified which includes an increase in the amount paid to foster carers referring a friend from £100 to £500 (Provisional approval has also been provided to the payment of a one-off cost of living award of £650 per fostering household but this is dependent upon the total grant received from the DWP and this information has not yet been received).</p> <p>December 2022</p>



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11	<p>That in addition to the training already offered, further consideration of high-quality training opportunities should be given to ensure that foster carers are fully prepared to deal with difficult behaviours, especially during out-of-hours. The Task Group would welcome consideration of the therapeutic support (available as a part of the Edge of Care offer) being offered to foster carers where appropriate.</p>	<p>Head of Service – Fostering</p> <p>Head of Service – Access and Sufficiency</p> <p>Team Manager – Fostering</p> <p>Recruitment and Training Officer</p>	<p>An analysis of the Emotional Health &amp; Wellbeing Panel is scheduled to review the requests from foster carers with a view to understanding common themes and review our commissioning arrangements.</p> <p>The training calendar is being developed as partners continue to offer additional training. This will also be added to the new website.</p> <p>As part of the on-going review and development of a robust package of training for all foster carers the opportunity and availability of therapeutic training has been explored and a 5-day training course has been successfully piloted. Costings for this to be offered as part of the training calendar are being progressed. This will be in addition to provision of a therapeutic parenting practitioner who will offer support to all children and families including foster carers.</p> <p>Individually funded therapeutic support continues to be offered in a targeted approach linked to the needs of specific children and their foster carers. The offer of support to foster carers from within the wider Edge of Care offer is agreed and completed.</p> <p>March 2023</p>
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12	That the current out of hours support available to foster carers be reviewed to consider the need for a dedicated response.	<p>Head of Service – Fostering</p> <p>Team Manager - Fostering</p> <p>Team Manager – EDT</p> <p>Principal Officer – HR</p>	<p>A questionnaire has been designed to ask foster carers about additional support ideas they would find helpful for out of hours</p> <p>The questionnaire has been developed to seek to understand foster carers experience, demand, and expectation. This will be circulated with a return date of 6 January 2023– these ideas will then be considered and developed.</p> <p>Part of the website development will include a secure ‘log-in’ for all foster carers. It is hoped this safe space will provide a forum to chat with other foster carers and staff. The foster carer champions are supporting the development of this work too.</p> <p>March 2023</p>
13	That an update on the recommendations of this Report is brought back to the Children and Young People Services Scrutiny Committee during the 2022/23 municipal year.	<p>Assistant Director – Children’s Social Care</p> <p>Head of Service – Fostering</p>	Report to be presented in January 2023