

Name of meeting: **Corporate Parenting Board**

Date: **24.4.17**

Title of report: **Fostering Agency Report**

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	No
Key Decision - Is it in the <a href="#">Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)</a>	No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	No
Date signed off by <u>Director</u> & name  Is it also signed off by the Director of Resources?  Is it also signed off by the Assistant Director (Legal Governance and Monitoring)?	N/A
Cabinet member <a href="#">portfolio</a>	Cllr Erin Hill

**Electoral wards affected: ALL**

**Ward councillors consulted: NIL**

**Public or private: PUBLIC**

## 1. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to brief the Corporate Parenting Panel on the current developments in the fostering service and the plans for the future of the service. This will include a brief analysis of the strengths, challenges and opportunities within the service.

## 2. Summary

As of the end of March 2017 Kirklees council had 683 Looked After Children. The fostering service currently looks after 298 children and young people. Of these 90 are placed with connected (friends and family) carers and 217 with mainstream (recruited) carers. We have 216 mainstream carers and 64 connected carers. 188 young people are placed with external Independent Fostering Agencies. As we are all aware there is an additional cost to placing with external agencies and therefore one of the key development areas for the service needs to be a more successful recruitment and retention strategy to significantly increase the number of carers available to the fostering service to ensure that we have the correct sufficiency of placements for our looked after children young people. In order to assist with this development an experienced interim fostering service manager was appointed at the end of February 2017.

### 3. Information required to take a decision

The current fostering development plan is focused on three main areas of practice:

- Business planning

The business planning strand of work will focus on the recruitment and retention of carers. Analysing the current activity it is clear that the service has been in a deficit model of practice effectively losing more carers than we have been recruiting. This has also coincided with the number of enquiries to foster falling significantly and our conversion of these into carer falling significantly. Information on how many carers we have lost over this period and why is not easily accessible.

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016 -17	
	Enquiries	Approvals	Enquiries	Approvals	Enquiries	Approvals	Enquiries	Approvals
	541	30	343	26	336	12	215	9

As demonstrated the number of enquiries has fallen by 58% and our conversion rate on these is has fallen from a high of 7.5% to 4.1%.

We have a current target to recruit an additional 21 carers each year (this being a net figure so we would need to recruit about 30 carers taking into consideration retirement of carers etc.) each year for the next three years. This is an achievable target but current work to analyse why this has not been working needs to take effect.

In order to remedy this situation the current team of social workers who are completing this 'front door' work, helping to attract carers and convert enquiries into assessments are in the process of being replaced by a team of fostering advisors. This is envisaged to be a more of marketing and recruitment role with a much more dynamic effort to entice those who call to agree to initial visits with a view to removing the barriers to foster. This has worked well in many other fostering services and is widely employed in the private sector. Leeds City Council have had particular success with this model.

Our aim is to both recruit people new to fostering and to also entice current carers back from IFA's. We have also very recently met with the Kirklees Fostering Network to ensure that we are working very closely together in all aspects of the service but particularly in terms of carer recruitment. It is true in fostering services that the best way to recruit carers is through word of mouth with your own carers. The more that KFN see that we are significantly improving our service, listening to their experiences and pro-actively finding solutions to the issues that they have the more they will recruit for us. This will also significantly improve our retention. Currently, a draft of a joint statement of intent between the KFN and the service is being worked on to publish for all our staff and carers making clear our intention to work as one for the good of Kirklees children and carers.

- Compliance

Currently we do not have good quality information as to the compliance of the service. The data that is needed is in regard to such things as:

- Carer supervisions
- Unannounced visits
- DBS checks for carers
- Annual reviews completed in the last 12 months

This data is necessary in order for us to know our service well. If we can measure this we can be more sure that we are on track to being good / outstanding. The service is currently working with the PRI team to ensure that this data is produced so that it can be reported, if needed at the performance clinics held by the AD.

- Quality assurance

The service is in the process of implementing a quality assurance framework which will help us to get the more detailed and rich story of how effective it is. This will include managers competing file audits and direct practice observations of staff.

There are many good areas of practice,. We have a robust panel, an excellent placement support team, many excellent staff and carers and building on this positivity and good practice is achievable. The financial targets set are challenging but manageable and have been well thought out. Ultimately we have a staff team and group of carers who are committed to Kirklees children but are in need of a vision and support to achieve this.

#### **4. Implications for the Council**

Increasing the sufficiency will have very substantial cost savings for the authority. This will also enable us to provide the best quality of care to our children that we will manage and control.

#### **5. Consultees and their opinions**

#### **6. Next steps**

#### **7. Officer recommendations and reasons**

- That the board take note of the information contained within the report.

#### **8. Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations**

#### **9. Contact officer**

#### **10. Background Papers and History of Decisions**

#### **11. Assistant Director responsible**