

Report of: Director of Children and Families

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Children & Families)

Date: 15 March 2018

Subject: Support for Foster Carers



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. This report outlines the range of support provided for approved foster carers and their families by the fostering service and key partners. This includes reference to support and retention activities for carers, their families and children looked after (para 1.14) now overseen by the Enrichment team for which a separate report is provided (para 1.15).

Recommendations

- 1.1 That Scrutiny Board receive this report and continue to support the work of the fostering service and it's approved foster carers and to promote the best possible outcomes for fostered children and young people.

2 Main Issues

- 2.2 As at end of December 2017, the Service supported and supervised a total of 736 approved carer households. Of these, 173 are approved Kinship Carer / Connected persons households caring for children and young people of their extended family. Mainstream placement types (non - Kinship) provided by foster carers include: Long Term / Permanence, Short Term / Emergency / Respite and short breaks for children with a disability or complex needs. The service has also developed and oversees placement provision for Supported Lodgings (young people age 16yrs+) and provides specialised placements including Parent and Child assessment. The total of approved foster carers is the highest the service has experienced making Leeds currently the largest Local Authority fostering service in the UK.
- 2.3 All mainstream and kinship foster carers are supported and supervised by a qualified social worker (Supervising Social Worker) meeting regulatory visiting and supervision requirements. There are seven staff teams of supervising social workers each with a Team Manager providing this support: two geographically focussed teams; a Recruitment and Assessment team; a team supporting and supervising foster carers with commitments to Teenagers; two Kinship Care Teams and the Children with Disabilities & Complex Needs Team. The Teenage Team has been recently established to support those foster carers who have commitments to often challenging older children and is developing additional support, including bespoke training and development and co- working with partners including the Youth Service. Support and supervision to Supported Lodgings carers is achieved via Social Work Assistants who also work with providers on the Rent a Room scheme.
- 2.4 For financial support, Leeds operates a Payment for Skills (PFS) model for its approved foster carers. All foster carers irrespective of type of approval are supported via weekly child age related allowance payments. The PFS model has four levels linked to a Tasks, Skills and Competencies (TSC) framework and in addition to allowances, weekly fees are paid to carers on Levels 2, 3 and 4.
- 2.5 It also sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that Level 4 Carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake. In return they are paid the highest level of fee. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests. Carers are able to progress up through the PFS levels (including Kinship Carers from Level 1) if evidencing required competencies and skills.
- 2.6 Weekly Allowances and Fees are detailed below. There has been recent Leadership agreement to increase fees by 2% from April 2018. In addition to weekly allowances and fees, foster carers can receive additional hourly payments for tasks undertaken outside their placement commitments including the delivery of training, providing individual support to families and childcare support to other carers.

Financial Support

Allowances - Weekly Amounts: April 2017 – April 2018

Child Age: Amount:

0-4 yrs	£142.86
5-10 yrs	£162.73
11-15 yrs	£202.58
16yrs+	£246.44

Payment for Skills (PFS) Fee structure and weekly fee amounts:

PFS Level	1 st Placement	2 nd Placement	Subsequent Placements
1	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	£120	£120	£60
3	£170	£170	£85
4	£220	£220	£110

- 2.7 The Leeds Payment for Skills model has been highlighted and endorsed in the National Fostering Stocktake report to Government (February 2018) as a recommended good practice example of a skills based fee system for foster carers. In preparing submissions and seeing examples of best practice for the report, the Stocktake team visited Leeds in August last year and met with a range of carers, staff, care experienced young people and the chair of the Leeds Foster Carer Association.
- 2.8 Allowances and Fee levels in Leeds are reviewed and agreed on a regular basis to ensure carers are financially well supported and rewarded for the skills they offer. Linked to the PFS scheme are Terms and Conditions for fee paid carers which provides for a range of agreed arrangements with carers including the

payment of retainers and annual leave entitlement. Terms and Conditions are periodically reviewed and agreed with carer stakeholders.

- 2.9 A Training and Development programme is provided for all approved foster carers and is incorporated in the PFS model. From newly approved carers through to the most experienced, training courses and development opportunities are provided with attendance requirements dependent on a carers PFS level. In addition, carers together with their Supervising Social Worker, achieve an annual Personal Development Plan which identifies learning and development needs. Foster carers work as stakeholders with the service and Workforce Development colleagues in developing new training and development initiatives to help meet their needs.
- 2.10 A comprehensive range of Support Groups for carers across the city have been established which offer peer support, training and other development opportunities. Some groups offer specialised support (e.g. Teens Carers group) and all groups are facilitated by Supervising Social Workers. There are dedicated support groups for Kinship Carers and Special Guardians and the Kinship Care teams can signpost carers to more informal groups and support networks in Leeds. From March, all newly approved carers will be linked to an experienced carer and dedicated staff for an initial introduction period and be offered a support group tailored to the needs of new carers.
- 2.11 Each support group has a representative who, alongside the Leeds Foster Carer Association (LFCA), attend the Foster Care Liaison Group (FCLG) which comprises Leadership, Elected Members and Service management and staff. Carers play a key stakeholder role and are regularly involved in a range of service developments regarding their support needs which result from their agenda items at FCLG. The service works with the LFCA in developing their support for their members, including the financial support of Fostering Network individual membership for carers which includes access to a range of benefits including independent legal advice and other information to assist with their role. All newly approved carers are enrolled as members of the LFCA and provided with a 'welcome to Leeds' link to an experienced LFCA member if they choose.
- 2.12 Fostering can often be challenging and may require enhanced support and advice. The Fostering Service has a referral route to the Therapeutic social work team and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who can provide input and advice to carers. The Therapeutic team offers a weekly 'fostering surgery' which has assisted carers in achieving placement stability and can also offer advice to the staff supporting them. Other key partners providing support for carers are the Virtual School who can provide individual advice and support for children's education needs and the Looked after Children Health Team who have dedicated nurses overseeing and advising carers on children's health needs and the promotion of children's health and well-being.
- 2.13 Leeds have been one of the original pilot authorities developing the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) for supporting carers in the UK. Leeds has now 7 established MFM 'Hubs' with an experienced Hub carer supporting a small group of 'satellite' carers and their children / young people. This model of support is proving successful with improving placement stability and importantly, carer

confidence in receiving a range of support and advice from the Hub carer. Successful aspects of MFM support are being considered for improving carer support generally across the service.

- 2.14 In order to support and value the work of foster carers and further assist their commitment to improving the life experiences and outcomes of the children they care for, Leeds introduced in 2013 the Corporate Offer for Foster Carers. Linked to developments with Child Friendly Leeds (CFL) initiative, the offer was the first of its type from a local authority, providing offers to carers and their families including free swimming lessons, leisure centre access and gym membership. This offer has been renewed annually since 2013 and has become an established and valued way for carers and their families to access important health and lifestyle opportunities.
- 2.15 In conjunction with the corporate offer, the fostering service developed with business and other partners as part of the CFL initiative a range of activities and events for carers and their families. This approach became part of the larger Leeds offer to carers and combined with the corporate offer, greatly enhances carer recruitment, support and retention. Enrichment activities and events for foster carers and kinship carers are now coordinated by the Enrichment Team with links to the fostering service.
- 2.16 A separate report from the Enrichment team detailing support to carers and their families is provided (see Appendix 1).
- 2.17 Foster Carers are recognised for their service and commitment via Long Service awards at 5, 10 and 15 years and at retirement and their achievements are celebrated at the Foster Carer Awards event. Various awards for service and outstanding contributions to fostering are made following nominations from other carers, children and young people looked after and service staff and partners. This year's event will be held on June 12th at Elland Rd stadium.
- 2.18 All approved foster carers have access to their own resources pages on the foster4leeds website providing key information and procedures and receive a regular e newsletter from the service providing news, views and contributions from staff, partners, carers and the LFCA.
- 2.19 To enhance support for carers as part of their continued commitment to young people 18 - 21 years of age (Staying Put), we provide a continuation of fee and allowance financial support based on their PFS level and continued Supervising Social Worker or Social Work assistant support. This offer to carers was agreed with carer stakeholders in 2014 before the launch of the Leeds Staying Put policy. This has assisted with carers continued support for vulnerable young people and their preparation for independence.

3 Corporate Considerations

3.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 3.1.1 Foster carers are involved in the development of services through various forums including the foster carer liaison group.

3.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

2.2.1 As in the body of the report

2.3 Council policies and Best Council Plan

2.3.1 The Children and Young People's Plan identifies children looked after as one of one of the three priority 'obsessions' and the work ensures the children are safely from harm and are well cared for.

2.4 Resources and value for money

2.4.1 None identified in this report.

2.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

2.5.1 This report is not subject to call in.

2.6 Risk Management

2.6.1 It is a requirement that periodic service reports are prepared and presented to Scrutiny.

4 Conclusions

4.1 This report details the range of support provided to foster carers in order for them to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people they look after.

5 Recommendations

5.2 That Scrutiny Board receive this report and continue to support the work of the fostering service and it's approved foster carers and to promote the best possible outcomes for fostered children and young people.

6 Background documents¹

6.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.