

Annual Fostering Report 2023/24

Date: 12th February 2025

Report of: Director of Children and Families

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

Foster 4 Leeds supports over 400 fostering placements for children looked after by Leeds. As the Leeds City Council Fostering Service Foster 4 Leeds provides high quality care through a range of different foster placements that enable children to grow up in a family context. We also support over 350 children to live with kinship or connected carers.

We are ambitious for all our Children Looked After to live in a family context and to experience family life, learning, growing and thriving in our care and the work of Foster 4 Leeds and our Kinship and Special Guardian support teams is critical to achieving this ambition.

Our fostering services play a crucial role in supporting our children. As some of the best quality and most cost effective care we have our fostering services also play a role in supporting the overall financial structure of the council.

Fostering Services are regulated by legislation and a requirement is that we produce an annual report. The Annual Fostering report provides an overview of the work and progress of the services that support our Foster Carers. The report notes the increase in Kinship Carers, work underway to increase the number of mainstream Foster Care placements and the work of the service during 2023/24.

Recommendations

- a) Executive Board is recommended to adopt the Leeds City Council Fostering Service: Annual Fostering Report 2023/24, as presented at appendix 1, together with the recommendations contained therein.

What is this report about?

- 1 The Local Authority as a provider of fostering services is required by regulation to produce an annual report. This report meets that requirement.
- 2 The report describes the work of the Fostering Service and our work to support Kinship Foster Carers. The report provides an overview of the work of the service in delivering training,

recruiting new carers, support to carer for children with complex needs and the Mocking Bord hubs.

- 3 As a city we remain committed to supporting families to provide care for their children. Our Kinship and Special Guardian service is crucial in achieving this ambition, but where a family or carers can't offer care to a child our Fostering Service provides an alternative.
- 4 Following the McAllister review we are now seeing proposals being developed by government that will specifically support our Fostering Service. The service will be engaging with the regional recruitment initiatives and has responded to the recent review of Kinship and Special Guardian services. These initiatives align with our Family Valued approach as a council and with our overall strategy to support families to care for their children.
- 5 The report provides an update on the action from the 2022/23 report and makes further recommendations for the service during 2024/25. These are:
 - As part of the Councils overall Sufficiency Strategy to increase the number of foster carers available to the service and to reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.
 - Develop a scheme for foster carers who can offer placements for young people currently in residential provision.
 - Develop the existing Care Support Service to ensure Fostering is doing all it can as service to lower the number of children becoming CLA.
 - Focus on our current enrichment and support offer to carers and how we can approve this.
 - Work in partnership with Child Friendly Leeds to engage communities and recruit more carers with diverse ethnicity.
 - Continue to work in partnership with Child Friendly Leeds to engage the third sector, sport organisations, education partners and internal Leeds City Council departments to maximise recruitment opportunities, with promotion of flexibility and different strands of fostering a priority.
 - Ensure that the Fostering Service works collaboratively with placement colleagues around effective placement planning and supports reunification plans, to help reduce the CLA population.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 6 The proposals will allow the Leeds Fostering Service to continue to play a central role in the care of our children. Fully realised the proposals will allow the service to increase the proportion of care provided directly by the council to our children and reduce the use of private sector care providers.
- 7 A robust and sufficient fostering offer contributes to outstanding outcomes for our children looked after. In addition to providing the care associated with the best outcomes, and expanded fostering service also contributes to an improved financial position for the council. The proposals for the development of the service contained in the report will significantly support the overall corporate financial position.

Please see attached EDCI Screening Form.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- 8 Children do best living with families. These proposals enhance the health and wellbeing of our children looked after, ensure that they are more likely to grow into adults who take a full part in

employment and their society and, by reducing out of area care, reduce the carbon cost of Social Workers having to travel to see children.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 9 The report has been agreed by the Children and Families Senior Leadership Team and by the Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Executive Member for Children & Families and attended by Childrens Champions from the Community Committees.

What are the resource implications?

- 10 The resourcing requirements are contained within the overall budget for the Corporate Parenting Service.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 11 That we have insufficient carers and this impacts on the consistency of care offered to children who are looked after, particularly those entering care. This impacts placement stability and requires increased use of external provision, meaning children are not residing in Leeds, are unable to access the services Leeds can provide.
- 12 If the Fostering Service is unable to achieve the objectives in the report it will not be able to support the overall corporate financial position. This report analyses those risks and mitigates for them well, with plans in place to increase recruitment and provide stability with fostering.

What are the legal implications?

- 13 This Annual Report ensures that Leeds City Council is compliant with it's legal recruitments. All the plans and work currently being carried out, and detailed within this report, are compliant with National Fostering Regulations.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

- 14 Fostering Services are regulated by legislation and there is a requirement to produce an annual report.

How will success be measured?

- 15 By the stability of children's care arrangements and the growth and diversification in the offer of the service.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

- 16 Responsibility sits with the Corporate Parenting Service and the Service Delivery Managers for Fostering and Kinship Fostering.

Appendices

- Annual Fostering Report
- EDCI Screening Form

Background papers

- None