

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Report

<b>Committee/Panel:</b>	Corporate Parenting Board
<b>Date:</b>	28 January 2021
<b>Title:</b>	Fostering Annual Report
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Children's Services

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#### **Purpose of this Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data and highlighting some focus areas for 2020/2021.

#### **Recommendation**

2. To note the annual report.

#### **Executive Summary**

3. The Fostering Annual report 2019/2020 provides an overview of fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data and highlighting some focus areas for 2020/2021

#### **Contextual information**

4. N/A

#### **Finance**

5. N/A

## **Performance**

6. This report provides an overview of the fostering service performance 2019-2020

## **Consultation and Equalities**

7. N/A

## **Main Report:**

### **Introduction**

8. This report provides an update on Hampshire County Council's fostering service in line with fostering services statutory regulations and guidance.
9. During 2019/2020 the service successfully recruited and approved 31 new fostering households.
10. At the end of June 2020 there were 483 registered foster carers in Hampshire.
11. The Fostering Service has a marketing strategy for 2020/2021; with a target to recruit 34 fostering households. The marketing strategy has been compiled using recommendations provided by research completed by the Insight and Engagement team as part of our Modernising Placements Programme which is focussing on increasing the number of fostering households.

### **The Fostering Service**

12. Hampshire fostering service is comprised of four teams.
13. The Recruitment and Assessment Team is a team of social workers, support worker, a marketing officer, and a panel co-ordinator. The team is responsible for marketing activity to recruit new foster carers to meet the needs of Hampshire children, visiting potential foster carers, completing fostering assessments and supporting applicants through to fostering panel.
14. There are two Fostering Support teams, East and West. The teams support approved foster carers, providing supervision and training to ensure foster carers' practice continues to meet the National Minimum Standards.

15. The Connected Carers' Assessment Team carries out assessments for fostering applicants who have a pre-existing relationship with a specific child and supports these applicants through to fostering panel.

### **Recruitment of foster carers**

16. In 2019/20, the fostering service rebranded and became 'Fostering Hampshire Children' updating its identity, digital presence, and information materials.

17. There have been varied recruitment events held over 2019/20 including large summer events and smaller drop events. We also trialled a number of supermarket information stands.

18. During 2019/20 we launched Foster Focus Week; our first regional awareness campaign. We increased radio and social media activity, distributed printed literature, and held information events each day across the county, resulting in 17 enquiries. This will now be an annual campaign.

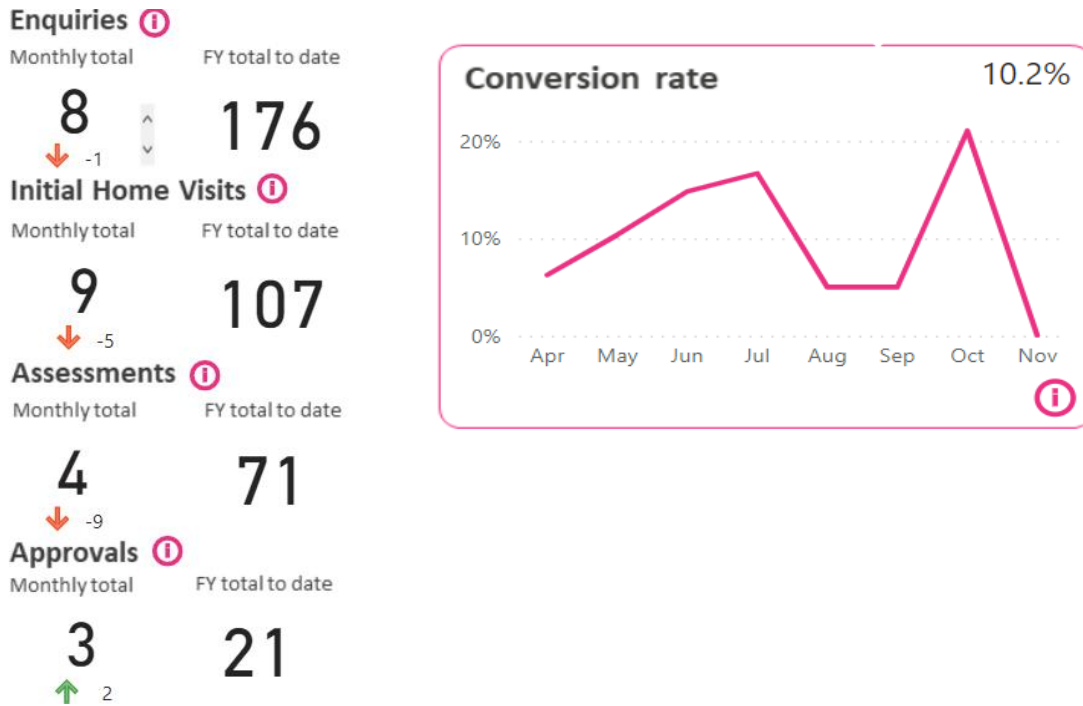
19. We have invested in our social media platforms, where engagement with potential foster carers has increased. Compared to 2018/19, our following on Facebook has increased by 33%, page actions +46% and impressions on Twitter have increased by 55%. On Google, our impression share increased by 55% throughout the year with a 3.2% click-through rate on average (1.9% is perceived as good on Google).

- Recruitment Data for 2019/20
  - Number of enquiries  
493
- Number of Initial Home Visits  
219
- Number of assessments initiated  
64
- Number of approvals  
31
- Conversion rate form enquiry to approval  
6%

20. Data from April 2020 to December 2020 tells us that whilst enquiries and initial home visits have decreased in comparison to 19/20, the number of assessments initiated has increased and approvals are likely to be very similar to last year. Data also shows that the conversion rate is 10.2% which is a significant increase from 19/20 and would suggest that our

marketing messages are targeting the right people, so that people who make an enquiry are more likely to become approved foster carers.

15 Snapshot of data from December 2020:



## Fostering support

16 In 2019/20 we introduced two new training courses which run four times per year: Child to Carer violence which supports de-escalation and understanding children's behaviour and a Relationship and Sex education course for foster carers to help them feel confident in discussions with teenagers in their care.

17 Each year we undertake a fostering survey to gather the views and experiences of our foster carers to support and improve our service. The most recent survey took place in June 2020 and showed an increase in foster carer satisfaction in all areas.

18 Foster carers satisfaction levels in comparison to 19/20 for different areas of the service

Table 1: Comparison of Satisfaction Levels of Foster Carers

	Satisfied or very satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
Recruitment	46% (43% 2019)	51% (52% 2019)	4% (5% 2019)
Assessment	58% (55% 2019)	38% (40% 2019)	3% (6% 2019)
PCT	55% (49% 2019)	37% (35% 2019)	9% (16% 2019)

Childrens SW	60% (37% 2019)	22% (22% 2019)	17% (28% 2019)
Family Placement	74% (64% 2019)	25% (26% 2019)	2% (11% 2019)
Payment	66% (50% 2019)	27% (24% 2019)	15% (27% 2019)
Being valued as a professional	49% (34% 2019)	20% (25% 2019)	30% (41% 2019)

19 In 2019, we held our first 'Foster Carer Get together', this was a social event for foster carers to come together and meet and talk to other foster carers. A range of managers were also present and engaged in social activities with foster carers. The feedback forms for this event were very positive and foster carers stated that they would like more events like this, which we plan to provide. However, currently plans for this have been on hold due to the disruption of Covid-19. Some alternative virtual events have been held but not on the same scale.

### **Connected Carers**

20 In 2019, Connected Carers' Assessing Social Workers moved under the structure of the district teams to promote improved joint working. There have been some positives in this change of structure but also some challenges. Co-locating children's social workers and assessing social workers has improved joint working and sharing of fostering knowledge. There have been challenges in ensuring consistency across the county and difficulty with no central oversight.

### **Fostering Panel**

21 The service has 6 fostering panels that are held each month. Each panel will hear a maximum of 5 cases.

22 The Service Manager meets with panel chairs on a quarterly basis to discuss any themes in panel, issues and training and development needs. An annual panel member training day was held in 19/20 which received positive comments from attendees. Further virtual training workshops are scheduled for January 2021.

### **Total Carers**

23 The total number of carers is remaining stable, at the end of June 2020 there were 483 registered foster carers in Hampshire, down from 485 the year before. This does not include those carers only offering staying put as they are no longer registered foster carers.

### Foster carers on hold

24 The average number of foster carer households on hold at any one time is 22.25. These have been for a variety of reasons, including foster carers choosing to take a break, other family or work commitments, and a small number due to complaint or allegation.

### Timeliness of foster carers annual household reviews

Table 2: Household Reviews within Timescales

% of foster carers with HHR's recorded in time	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	83%	83%	83%	74%	89%

25 There was a significant decrease in the number of foster carer households with a timely household review in Q4, this was a concern which has now been addressed.

### Timeliness of supervision visits

Table 3: Supervision Visits within Timescales

% of foster carers with supervision recorded in time	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	75%	72%	81%	78%	94%

26 Foster carer supervision has been an area of focus for the team Current data (June 2020) shows an improvement to 94% compliance in this area.

### Timeliness of unannounced visits

Table 4: Timeliness of Unannounced Visits

% of foster carers with unannounced visits in time	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	90	95	93	90	89%

27 The service has continued to ensure a high level of compliance in completing and timely recording of unannounced visits.

## Foster Carer Medicals

Table 5: Foster Carer Medicals Overdue

Number of overdue Medical checks	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	89	76	103	137	187

28 This number of overdue medicals represents 22% of those that require a medical which gives a 78% compliance rate in this area.

## DBS checks

Table 6: Overdue DBS Checks

Number of overdue DBS checks	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	128	119	119	181	131

29 This number of overdue DBS checks represents 12% of those that require a DBS check which gives an 88% compliance rate in this area.

30 There will always be a small number of overdue DBS checks due to young people within the household turning 18 years. It is not possible to complete a DBS check until a young person turns 18 years therefore this becomes overdue the day of the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

31 Overdue medicals and DBS checks are a continuing area of focus. There is a process in place to initiate these checks three months before they are due.

32 There has been a recent change in the way we process medical forms to comply with GDPR. The medical forms now go straight from the GP to the Medical advisor instead of coming back to the department first which makes it very difficult to check and monitor where any delay is being caused. The service will be exploring potential solutions to this issue which could include an IT/ electronic system solution.

33 There is a tracking spreadsheet for all DBS checks that evidences DBS checks are being initiated in a timely way. There is some delay with foster carers not responding to the electronic link they are sent in a timely way and this step needing to be repeated.

## Deregistration

34 Over 19/20 there were 80 fostering households de-registered, 49 of these households were connected carers of which 39 were a result of positive

outcomes for the children through adoption, Special Guardianship, moving on to independent living and reunification.

35 Of the 31 county carers deregistered (including specialist respite care), the reasons were:

Table 7: Reason for County Carer Deregistration's

Reasons for deregistration	
Change of circumstances	17
Retired	2
Specialist respite care child moved on	1
Dissatisfaction	3
Death of one of the carers	1
Moved out of area	3
Ill health	2
Adoption	1
Staying put/shared lives	1

36 Of those where a change of circumstances was provided as a reason for deregistration, some of the following themes have been noted:

- 2 foster carer households struggled after taking their first placement with the impact on theirs and their children's lives
- Wanting to spend more time with family
- Change of employment
- Own family composition changed
- Family caring commitments

37 Of the 3 foster carers that felt dissatisfied with the department, two felt that they had a lack of placements, looking at both of these cases, one fostering household only cared for babies which limits who can be matched with them and the other had very limited availability. The third foster carer household was an SRC carer who felt dissatisfied with having to chase payments. The service is aware of some payment delays for foster carers and as an action from this a Rapid Improvement Event was held to work on plans to resolve this which are currently being worked on as part of the Retention workstream in the Modernising Placements Programme.

38 In 2019/2020 we initiated an exit interview process for foster carers where they give permission.

### **Complaints and allegations against foster carers**

39 The Council has a Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers procedure as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.



40 In total there have been 123 concerns/complaints/allegations initiated within the 2019/20 period. These were concluded as the following:

Table 8: Concerns, Complaints and Allegations initiated in 2019/20

Concern	Complaint	Allegation
51	39	33

41 Of these concerns, complaints and allegations, the outcomes were:

Table 9: Outcomes of Concerns, Complaints and Allegations

Continued fostering	114
De-registration	7
Resignation	2

42 No cases were presented to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) in 19/20.

### **Modernising Placements Programme (MPP)**

43 As mentioned above, there is a substantial transformation programme underway with the aim of ensuring that Hampshire children are provided with the right support at the right time. The needs of our children have increased over recent years, and with the success of our Transforming Social Care programme ensuring that children can remain at home wherever it is safe to do so, those children who are in our care have the most complex needs. We need to ensure that our foster carers have the skills, support and capability to respond to these needs and MPP is focussed on all aspects of the journey for a foster carer from enquiry right through to approval and support.

44 Foster carers have been involved in this programme of work and are helping to shape and develop new approaches. One of these new approaches is moving towards a Hampshire Hive model of support where a Hive Carer supports 6-10 other fostering families akin to the wider family support that many children receive from aunts, uncles, grandparents. This model will be launched in the summer for applications from foster carers to be Hive Carers and so far, has received very positive feedback. Additionally, we are considering other supports to foster carers in learning and training and changes to our skills fees model.

### **Hampshire Fostering Network (HFN)**

45 The service continues to work closely with Hampshire Fostering Network. The service attends the monthly committee meetings and facilitates monthly operational meetings with the Fostering Service Manager, the CIC lead and HFN chair and vice chair. Although these meetings have not been held in recent months due to Covid-19, virtual meetings have been

offered. The Service continues to communicate information to HFN and work closely with members when reviewing practice and policies. The service has also started communication directly with foster carers via an opt in database which foster carers subscribe to, allowing the service to share information readily and deliver a monthly service newsletter.

### **Wider placement context:**

- 46 Fostering is the main type of provision that the placement team search for. Of the referrals for young people requiring accommodation, the request for foster care make up 53 % of the referrals that Children and Families branch make. The average number of young people who are supported in IFA (Independent Fostering Association) placements at any one time is 439, this is 48% of the foster care placements, with the other 52% being supported by in house foster carers. Occasionally the placement team need to look at alternative placements to those that the social work teams have requested. The percentage of referrals not in line with the original request has been steadily decreasing. Currently only 4.7% are not in line, this includes young people requesting residential care but being found a foster placement and vice versa.
- 47 Over the last year there were 44 foster placement requests for new unaccompanied asylum seeking minors. In the autumn of 2020 HCC agreed to support 10 young people arriving into Dover's port as Kent had hit a crisis point with the volume of new entrants. This support is part of a national scheme. There was some really positive work with our foster care providers and out of hours team to support this as safely as possible for those young people.
- 48 Hampshire currently have two fostering frameworks which both expire in March 2022. The Procurement and Commissioning Team are in the process of reviewing the most effective option for these going forward linking with the Modernising Placements Programme. The specialist framework has seen a lot less than anticipated use, primarily because of the other initiatives that have been embedded by frontline staff as part of the Hampshire Approach. In terms of the retender the current proposal is for the two fostering frameworks to merge.

### **Conclusions**

- 49 The Fostering Service has continued in its efforts to provide a high level of support and supervision to Hampshire foster carers. Further improvement has been made in some compliance data since April 2020.
- 50 31 new foster carer households were approved in 19/20, however 31 county foster carer household also deregistered. The focus for 20/21 is on recruitment and retention to increase our overall foster carer household numbers. Work within the Modernising Placements Programme has

supported the service to identify specific groups to target within foster carer recruitment which has enabled the service to tailor marketing messages.

- 51 New training for foster carers was facilitated to enable foster carers to meet the changing needs of our looked after children. The service is currently reviewing the foster carer training pathway with a view to increasing foster carer resilience and support to care for children with higher needs and more complex behaviours.
- 52 Foster carers have provided feedback about the service through the foster carer survey which saw increased satisfaction in all areas.
- 53 New initiatives including Foster Focus Week and a foster carer get together received positive feedback and will now become annual events.
- 54 There remains a need to improve the process for ensuring that foster carers have medical and DBS rechecks, and this remains a focus for 20/21.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes/no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes/no
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes/no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes/no
<b>OR</b>	
<p><b>This proposal does not link to the Strategic Plan but, nevertheless, requires a decision because:</b></p> <p><i>NB: Only complete this section if you have not completed any of the Strategic Plan tick boxes above. Whichever section is not applicable, please delete.</i></p>	

*NB: If the 'Other significant links' section below is not applicable, please delete it.*

**Other Significant Links**

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

<b>Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents</b>	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

## EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

### 1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### 2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <http://intranet.hants.gov.uk/equality/equality-assessments.htm>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*