

North Tyneside Council

Report to Cabinet

Date: 14 October 2019

Title: Fostering Strategy 2019-21

Portfolio(s): Children, Young People and Learning	Cabinet Member(s): Councillor P. Earley
Report from Service Area:	Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding
Responsible Officer:	Jacqui Old, Head of Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding (Tel: 0191 643 7317)
Wards affected:	All Wards

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the proposed Fostering Strategy, attached at Appendix 1, for the three-year period 2019 to 2021. The Strategy seeks to give effect to the Authority's duties under Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 which requires the Authority take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority's area which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority care for and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the Local Authority's area (the so-called 'sufficiency duty').

The Fostering Strategy has the following key aims and objectives:

1. To increase the total number of local Foster Carers available for the children and young people of North Tyneside;
2. To increase the number of Foster Carers with the skills to care for teenagers;
3. To increase the number of Foster Carers with the skills to care for sibling groups;
4. To improve the resilience of our Foster Carers through our support to them, reducing the number of placements which break down;
5. To cease the use of Independent Fostering Agency placements by the Authority;
6. To reduce the number of Children's Home placements for children and young people in favour of placements with skilled Foster Carers.

The Strategy is intentionally ambitious. It seeks to introduce improved consultation and

engagement with Foster Carers, improve the allowances paid by the Authority to Foster Carers and link payments to skills, improve the support provided, recruit more actively and enhance the training that is offered. Over the three-year period, the Strategy will seek to deliver:

- The end of the use of Independent Fostering Agency placements;
- An additional 30 Fostering Households, of which 10 will offer specialist placements;
- The placement of 90% of our children in care with our own local Foster Carers, keeping them connected to their community;
- The placement of 80% of sibling groups together.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is recommended to agree and if minded to do so, to authorise the Head of Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding to implement the Strategy as detailed within this Report.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty-eight days' notice of this report has been given and this item first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 9 September 2019.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

The 2018-2020 Our North Tyneside Plan states that 'Our people will':

- Be listened to so that their experience helps the Council work better for residents.
- Be ready for school – giving our children and their families the best start in life.
- Be ready for work and life – with the right skills and abilities to achieve their full potential, economic independence and meet business needs.
- Be healthy and well – with the information, skills and opportunities to maintain and improve their health, well-being and independence, especially if they are carers.
- Be cared for, protected and supported if they become vulnerable including if they become homeless.
- Be encouraged and enabled to, whenever possible, be more independent, to volunteer and to do more for themselves and their local communities.

Effective recruitment and retention of Foster Carers contributes to these priorities, in particular ensuring that children and young people resident in the Borough are cared for, protected and supported.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

The Authority has pledged to the children and young people of the Borough that it will only care for them when it has first worked tirelessly to keep them safe within their family home. The Authority successfully delivers on this pledge and hundreds of children remain within their family home and connected to their community because of the help and support that the Authority and its partners provide to make it safe for them to do so.

When it is absolutely necessary for a child or young person to move from their family home to keep them safe, the Authority will try to place a child or young person in the care of someone known to them and part of their network. Such placements minimise the impact

on children and young people having to leave their own home. There are about 75 of our children helped in this way by the Authority at any one time.

Where the network of family and friends around a child or young person is not able to care for them, the Authority requires Foster Carers – residents who open their door and their lives to a child or young person in need of love and care. At any one time, over 120 of our children and young people are cared for in Foster Care. Accordingly, Foster Carers make an extraordinary and important contribution to the life of our community.

Nationally, there are too few Foster Carers for the number of children and young people requiring care. This is also the situation locally. The Authority has faced significant challenge in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of Foster Carers to meet the needs of the Borough, in particular Foster Carers skilled at caring for teenagers (85% of our children needing care are between 11-15 years of age) and Foster Carers who are skilled at caring for sibling groups (only 40% of sibling groups in our care are currently placed together). Set against this challenging need, the Authority is recruiting in an increasingly competitive marketplace for new carers, with other local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies actively recruiting residents within our Borough.

To meet the Foster Care needs of the Borough, a new three-year Fostering Strategy has been developed in consultation with Foster Carers and other stakeholders (details of the consultation process, findings and implications can be found in Appendix 3). The Strategy identifies five key changes that the Authority's Fostering Service will implement if the Strategy is approved. Under the Strategy the Authority will:

1. In line with Our North Tyneside Plan to listen, consult more widely and more often

This element of the Strategy relates to feedback from Foster Carers that their voice and experience has not been as central to developments in fostering as possible. The Fostering Strategy details a range of actions that will improve consultation and engagement with our Fostering Community. As with the consultation to inform the current improvements these consultation events will be supported by the participation and engagement service.

2. Pay more and pay differently in order to establish transparency in finance and a competitive fostering payment structure to improve recruitment of foster carers

This element of the Strategy relates to the need to respond to innovations by other providers in relation to payments to Foster Carers and the need for payments by the Authority to be competitive. The Strategy details a range of changes to the payments made to Foster Carers, most significantly linking payments to the skills of carers and training accessed. It also includes uplifts in the amounts of some allowances, achieving parity with the payments made by other providers. These changes represent critical elements of our recruitment and retention effort.

3. Offer more and better support, following the Our North Tyneside plan to support people to be cared for and protected

This element of the Strategy relates to the need for the Authority to be a Fostering Agency of choice for prospective Foster Carers. It details enhancements in the support that is offered to our Foster Carers.

4. Make the Fostering role more visible and accessible as part of the corporate parenting responsibility of the whole Council

This element of the Strategy relates to the need for the Authority to be more active in marketing its need for and offer to prospective Foster Carers. It includes the deployment of a dedicated advertising budget.

5. Offer more training to more skilled Carers in order to encourage and enable carers to meet the needs of vulnerable children young people

This element of the Strategy focuses on the training offer to Foster Carers provided by the Authority. It details a competitive and compelling offer.

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Cabinet:

Option 1

Cabinet accepts the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2.

Option 2

Cabinet does not accept the recommendations set out in paragraph 1.2, and provides an alternative response to the Report at the meeting.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended in order to meet the Foster Care needs of the Borough.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Fostering Strategy
Appendix 2 – Fostering Framework
Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

1.9 Contact officers:

Jacqui Old, Head of Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding Tel. 0191 643 7317
Julie Firth, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Children's Services Tel. 0191 643 5943
Stephen Ballantyne, Legal Manager – Governance and Employment, Law and Governance Tel. 0191 643 5329
Jodie Henderson, Senior Manager, Children Services Tel. 0191 643 7388

1.10 Background information:

No additional background papers/information have been used in the compilation of this report.

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

Detailed financial modelling has been undertaken to ensure that the three-year Fostering Strategy is affordable and provides best value for money. The Strategy adopts an invest to save approach in which increases in some of the amounts paid as allowances to our Foster Carers to ensure parity of our offer with other providers are offset by the reduction

of third-party expenditure on placements as the Strategy delivers increased numbers of Carers.

Financial Implications	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Cumulative
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Cost Increase	0.526	0.976	1.148	2.650
Cost Saving	(0.430)	(1.014)	(1.248)	(2.692)
Net Increase / (Decrease) in Costs	0.096	(0.038)	(0.100)	(0.042)
Efficiency Savings Target	0.060	0.060	0.060	0.180
Efficiency Savings Unachieved / (Over Achieved)	0.156	0.022	(0.040)	0.138

The Strategy is predicted to require an additional investment of £0.156m in Year 1, and in year 2 £0.022m funded within existing resources within Children’s Services. In year 3 the Strategy is predicted to achieve cost savings of £0.040m. Should the Strategy exceed the recruitment targets set, further cost savings may be realised.

This is part of the fostering policy savings business case which projects to save £0.180m by the end of 2021/22. It is expected that the implementation of this Fostering Strategy will achieve £0.042m of the total £0.180m saving target. The Service are continuing to explore other options to achieve the remaining £0.138m balance and remain confident this will be achieved by the end of 2021/22.

2.2 Legal

Under section 22G of the Children Act 1989 the Authority is required to take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority’s area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the Local Authority’s area (the so-called ‘sufficiency duty’).

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

In the development of the proposed Fostering Strategy our Fostering Community has been consulted. The consultation has taken the form of four events spread over different days and times of the week and at different venues to promote ability for carers to attend. These events were attended by 53 carers. Carers were provided with a summary of the strategy and the proposed changes. At these events the carers were invited to record any questions or comments. In addition, a snap survey was provided to support the gathering of views on the strategy. A further 10 Carers who were unable to attend events and who did not want to complete the survey met with the fostering team managers separately and shared their views.

The main themes arising from the consultation relate to: -

- The proposals around mileage – 10 responses
- Sibling payments, payments and allowances – 10 responses

- Wider support – 12 responses
- Development and approval of the strategy – 4 responses
- The skills to foster framework -17 responses
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We received 43 completed surveys from foster carers. The responses to the survey questions largely, mirrored the issues that had been raised through the consultation events.

As a result of the consultation feedback we have taken the following actions: -

- Revised the mileage proposals
- Agreed to provide greater clarity around how the skills to foster framework will be applied
- We have not made any changes to the proposals regarding sibling payments but have given an undertaking to review the framework bi-annually, to ensure our offer is in line with near neighbours
- We have re-emphasised our commitment to extending our wider support and training offer and will continue to develop this outside of the bi-annual review of the framework

2.4 Human rights

There are no direct human rights implications arising from this report.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken in relation to the Fostering Strategy detailed in this report. This attached at Appendix 3.

2.6 Risk management

The implementation of the proposed Fostering Strategy will address the risk of insufficient Foster Care placements to meet the needs of the Borough. The lack of placements for child and young people requiring care to safeguard them from harm is a significant corporate risk in terms of our statutory responsibilities towards children and in relation to placement budget pressures resulting from the purchase of higher cost placements from third party commercial providers.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no specific environment and sustainability implications arising from this report.

PART 3 - SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive X
- Head of Service X
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s) X
- Chief Finance Officer X
- Monitoring Officer X
- Head of Corporate Strategy and Customer Service X