

# North Tyneside Council

## Report to Cabinet

Date: 26 June 2023

Title: North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration

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Portfolio(s): Children Young People and Learning	Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Peter Earley
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Report from Service

Area: Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

Responsible Officer: Julie Firth, Director of Children's Services (0191) 643 5943

Wards affected: All Wards

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### PART 1

#### 1.1 Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to the Authority being part of a Department for Education pilot project in the North East of England known as the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration. The project is designed at improving the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

In response to the Independent Care Review published February 2021 and the launch of the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy; 'Stable Homes, Built on love' in February 23, the Department for Education (DfE) has committed to recruiting 9,000 foster carers by 2026. The Department is seeking to deliver a holistic package of intervention on a regional basis to support the greatest sufficiency pressures and put in place end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers. Subsequently the DfE have selected the North East as the UK's national pilot / pathfinder region for a fully-funded, 1 year project to improve foster carer recruitment and

retention and have selected Together for Children Sunderland as the regional implementation lead.

## 1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1) Agree to the Authority becoming a member of the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) and the regional collaboration for the duration of the 1 year pilot scheme; and

2) Authorise the Director of Children's Services to take all necessary steps to implement the preceding recommendation.

## 1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty eight days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 19 May 2023.

## 1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to the following priority in the 2021/25 Our North Tyneside Plan:

A caring North Tyneside:

- Our People will be cared for, protected and supported if they become vulnerable including if they become homeless.

## 1.5 Information:

### 1.5.1 Background

The pathfinder project and regional collaboration is separated into three strands, support hub for a regional recruitment process, communications/marketing campaign and a further roll out of the Mockingbird model of foster care. This model of care has a hub home foster carer who supports a group of carers known as a 'constellation' by building strong relationships with each of them. Carers are supported to feel empowered and support one another with any problems that may arise. The Authority has one Mockingbird constellation and within this regional pilot, plans are underway to develop the second one in the Autumn.

The regional support hub strand of this project will have a number of functions, including receiving initial enquiries in a timely way and obtaining further information from prospective foster carers, but also supporting them through their assessment journey including providing a 'buddy scheme' with local, existing foster carers and providing a regional training offer. There will be telephone conversations or 'check ins' with prospective carers within the hub to ensure that the prospective foster carers are still on track and to maintain positive relationships on their journey to becoming foster carers and to identify any challenges that might derail them from successful approval.

These elements require support hub staff to be able to record their work in a case management system from which detailed reporting can be provided to support analysis of the overall success of the hub in terms of the project's foster carer recruitment goals, as well as day to day operational analysis e.g. an operational dashboard. There is a need to receive external data from other Local Authority areas to update the hub as to the progress of prospective foster carer journeys to aid this analysis. Further work in respect of this element is being developed within a data and performance subgroup.

To offer further detail, the support hub will aim to:

- Increase completed fostering applications from target groups which will broaden the demographic of carers and help those children/young people who may be most difficult to place such as teenagers, those with the greatest needs and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). Information from the support hub will look to address misconceptions about who can foster and different fostering options.
- Increase the number of quality enquiries ensuring those who progress through to application have the skills and appropriate intentions to enter into foster caring.
- Increase the conversion rate from initial enquiry to application, given the increased volume of enquiries, measured by data gathering and evaluation.
- Regional collaboration to set a consistent and coherent narrative and to lay the groundwork for regional care cooperatives in the longer term, should this be taken forward.
- Collaboration in respect of further roll out of the Mockingbird project is also proposed. This funding is to meet additional costs that will arise as a

result of expanding the number of constellations in each Local Authority by 1-2. Further information in respect of the roll out of Mockingbird regionally will be shared in due course.

## **1.6 Reasons for recommended option:**

Foster cares in North Tyneside provide high quality care for some of our most vulnerable children and as such we value, highly, the part they play in making a difference to children's lives. Ideally we would want to be able to offer more children and young people the family based care provided by our foster cares.

The Directors of Children's Services within 12 North East local authorities in scope for this pilot have agreed to work with Sunderland City Council as the lead to develop the project. On a national and regional level, recruiting sufficient numbers of foster carers for the number of children requiring care remains a challenge. Testing out this way of working, alongside North Tyneside now being a Fostering Friendly Employer, may reduce some of these challenges.

Recruiting more foster carers to support children and young people being cared for in fostering families within the Borough, is a priority. This pilot will enable us to consider if this has been of benefit in recruiting more carers to achieve this. The costs associated with using external providers can be high and so it is hoped this will see a reduction.

Extending the Mockingbird model of care within this pilot, ensures we continue to offer robust support to current foster carers in the valuable roles they have in caring for vulnerable children.

## **1.7 Appendices:**

None.

## **1.8 Contact officers:**

Julie Firth, Director Children's Services, Children, Young People and Learning  
(0191) 643 5943

Claire Brodie, Interim Senior Manager, Children in Care, Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

## **1.9 Background information:**

Background documents considered for this proposal;

Independent Review of Childrens Social Care at: [Independent review of children's social care: final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441111/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-final-report.pdf)

Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation at [Children's social care stable homes built on love consultation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441111/stable-homes-built-on-love-implementation-strategy-and-consultation.pdf)

Integrated Impact Assessment at [northtynesideintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13343](https://northtynesideintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13343)

## **PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING**

### **2.1 Finance and other resources**

There are no costs attached to this pilot and the DfE is fully funding this for 1 year.

### **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 Authority is 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'). In order to comply with this duty, the Authority needs sufficient numbers of foster carers who are able to provide safe and suitable accommodation for looked after children.

### **2.3 Consultation/community engagement**

#### **2.3.1 Internal Consultation**

The Directors of Children's Services within the region have been consulted on at this stage and lead senior officers from each of the North East local authorities are working with Together for Children Sunderland, supporting the development and implementation of the pilot project.

#### **2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement**

A cohort of foster carers have been identified within each local authority area to challenge and support the development of the pilot.

## **2.4 Human rights**

Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights states that everyone has the qualified right to respect for their private and family life. The families of some “Looked after” children may claim to have had that right interfered with. However, that right must be balanced against the rights of children to have a safe and stable home life and that right is promoted if there are more foster carers available in the Borough.

## **2.5 Equalities and diversity**

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken by Sunderland City Council on behalf of the 12 Authorities who are to become part of the pilot scheme and a link to the EIA is provided as a background document IN 1.9. It highlights that an inclusive approach will be adopted to the recruitment of foster carers and how communication will be accessible.

## **2.6 Risk management**

The implementation of the proposed pilot will address some of the risks of not having sufficient Foster Care arrangements to meet the needs of children in the Borough. The lack of resource for children and young people requiring care is a significant corporate risk in terms of our statutory responsibilities towards children and in relation to budget pressures resulting from the purchase of higher cost placements from third party 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 crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **PART 3 – SIGN OFF**

- Chief Executive

X

- Director(s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Assistant Chief Executive