

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 4 December 2018

Subject: Annual Reports Fostering and Adoption Services

Report of: The Head of Looked After Children

Summary

The annual fostering report outlines key issues, challenges and outcomes from Manchester's Fostering Services during the reporting year from April 1st 2017 to 31st March 2018.

In the reporting year in response to the increase in numbers of Looked After Children from the previous year (1170 in 16/17 to 1250 in 17/18) the service recruited more in house carers (293 from 229 in the year before).

One of our key priorities in the 2016/17 report was to reduce the number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and increasing the use of our own fostering households. We had 439 children and young people placed with IFA's in 2017/18, a reduction from 489 in the year before. There were a total of 488 children and young people placed with in house foster carers, an increase from 396 in 2016/17. This figure comprises 293 children with recruited fostering households and 195 children were placed with 'connected persons' carers.

During the year there was a total of 337 children placed with our in house carers. This is an improvement from 2016/17 when we made 317 new placements. The report outlines that we recruited 32 new fostering households and 35 connected carers in the year. This is an increase from 30 in the year previously. Unfortunately, 27 fostering households resigned or left us in the year, mostly through retirement, ill health or moving to another area.

In previous years, Manchester Foster Care Association was commissioned to provide independent support service to carers who are subject to complaints and allegations. Following a commissioning and procurement exercise, the contract was awarded to Fostertalk who have established the service to provide an independent support service for our foster carers and supported lodgings carers. They are a nationally renowned non profit organisation who provide a dedicated helpline to carers and will directly support them through any allegations or complaints. In addition, they support carers with issues around tax, development and training. Earlier in the year, carers take up of the service had been lower than expected but this has subsequently increased as the year has progressed.

The relationship with MFCA (Manchester Foster Carer Association) remains an important one. Subsequently it has been agreed the association will continue to be a member of our Corporate Parenting Panel, a senior officer will attend the Annual General Meetings twice yearly, facilitate the promotion of support and activities being

made available for our foster-carers and how the MFCA can help and promote the recruitment of foster-carers. In addition, MFCA will attend regular foster carer forums and training and the Head of LAC and fostering Service Manager will meet with them quarterly

Appendix II - Adoption Service from Adoption Counts Annual report - April 17 to March 18

The Annual Adoption Report reflects the adoption service being delivered to Manchester Adopters and is managed by Adoption Counts as our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). This is a collaborative approach to delivering an adoption agency which brings the expertise and specialist skills of Manchester, Cheshire East, Salford, Stockport and Trafford. The service is commissioned by the Council and provided by Adoption Counts.

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) are a Department of Education initiative that set out Governments aim to see all local authorities with adoption responsibilities move to shared regional adoption agencies; it is worth noting the supporting legislation has provision to direct a Local Authority to be part of a RAA. They were created to replace the previous system of council adoption, to bring together groups of local councils to work better together on adoption. The regional agencies increase the pool of potential adoptive families and help match children awaiting adoption with the most suitable family as quickly as possible.

Within the reporting period 2017/18, 49 children were adopted with the average time taken to complete was 294 days. This is a reduction from the 80 placed in 2016/17 prior to the RAA taking over. This reduction in children adopted is due to two factors;

- The number of complex children waiting from previous years were successfully placed in 2016/17
- A national reduction in the numbers of Placement Orders granted by the Courts.

Although the reduction in the number of placement orders being granted has reduced, it has continued to have an impact on numbers of children placed and adopted in the years 2017/18 and the current year.

On 31st March 2018, there were 34 children subject to placement orders but not placed. Adoption Counts anticipate that they will have completed 49 adoptive placements/orders by March 2019 and responded to c598 enquiries from people wishing to consider becoming an adopter across all the member local authorities. This is an increase from the previous year and indicates that the marketing and recruitment of the new service is having an impact however challenges remain in recruiting and approving prospective adopters for larger group and black minority ethnic children.

Recommendations

Committee members are asked to consider the improvements made in relation to fostering and adoption and comment on the findings and recommendations contained therein.

Wards Affected: All

Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Both reports show the developments across our fostering and adoption services, utilising our local population to help and support Manchester
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Both reports show the developments across our fostering and adoption services, utilising our local population to help and support Manchester - Manchester people helping Manchester's children and young people.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None