

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

1 February 2016

FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT

Report of the Head of Looked After Children

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report is to outline the work undertaken to recruit additional Foster Carers to ensure that we have sufficient in house provision.

2. Introduction/Background

- 2.1 At the time of writing this report we have 544 Sunderland Looked After Children. We currently have 188 Foster Carers registered within Sunderland City Council and 366 children placed with them, with 10 vacancies across the service (due to carers resting or children that require solo placements).
- 2.2 We have 71 children placed within Independent Fostering Agency Placements, ranging from £730 per week to our most expensive IFA of £1450 per week (only one such placement).
- 2.3 Over the last 9 months we have seen a number of carers recruited, from March 15 until December '15 we have had 13 Foster Carers 'Approved', 3 as a result of 'word of mouth', 3 on own initiative, 2 resulting from a radio advert, 2 resulting from an IFA transfer, 1 from an open evening, 1 from Newspaper advert and 1 who we have been unable to determine the source.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 We commenced a new recruitment campaign in November 2015, using the same photographic materials, but using a new tag line 'Foster for Sunderland', ensuring that this message was prominent and clear.
- 3.2 We used a number of media outlets as follows:
- Article in Community News
 - Message on all council staff payslips
 - Pop up message (that's the message that appears when staff log in to their computers)
 - Two month long radio campaign (includes x 2 40 second adverts running x 5 times a day (we also get additional free airtime when they have a space), plus a link from the radio station website to ours (they get around 1,000,000 visits over the winter period as they also include information on school

closures). We also featured interviews with a foster carer on air and this was also accessible from the radio station's website.

- Advert in Workwise (issued to all council employees with February's payslip)
- Posters (adshells) – we have posters in five areas of the city as well as an additional 10 poster sites in the city centre going up in January.
- In March, we've booked an advert in New Family Social targeting LGBT carers.

3.3 The results of this short campaign so far are as follows:

FOSTERING ENQUIRIES		
	TEL	WEB VISITS
NOV	20	190
DEC	10	173
JAN (to 12 th)	7	Not available

This compares favourably with the previous months enquiries as indicated within the table below:

April 15	May 15	June 15	July 15	Aug 15	Sept 15	Oct 15
2	0	1	2	5	3	4

- 3.4 It is still early days to properly assess the impact of this campaign, but clearly ensuring that Sunderland City Council is indicating a need, is a good start.
- 3.5 We have lost 7 foster carers this year due to retirement and de-registration.
- 3.6 On average the conversion rate from enquiry to approval of Foster Carer is around 11% nationally, in Sunderland its around 7%.
- 3.7 In order to reduce the need for IFA placements based on current numbers we would have to recruit in the region of 30-35 carers to meet demand. This would require on average 500 enquiries in order to meet the conversion rate threshold.
- 3.8 We have been successful in recruiting carers directly from Independent Fostering Agencies, following the review of all externally placed children and young people. We have managed to attract 6 carers via direct approaches (currently in the process of going through the transfer procedure), but this has caused some difficulties within the relationships with these IFA's.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 Going forward, we are working with the Communications and procurement teams to put out a design brief for a new brand for recruitment materials.
- 4.2 We need to have a continuous recruitment campaign.
- 4.3 It would be helpful to have a fulltime Marketing co-ordinator based within the LAC service, in order to maximise our recruitment options for both Fostering and Adoption. We are exploring this option.
- 4.4 We will need to relook at our Financial Package for our Foster Carers, in order to compete with other LA's and IFA's.
- 4.5 We are at the very beginning of negotiations to look at a pan North East collaborative recruitment campaign, but await the first meeting to discuss this. The expected start of any campaign will likely be January '17.

5.0 Recommendations

The Corporate Parenting Board are asked to note the content of the report and ask any questions and make any suggestions that they may have.