

**Meeting: Policy, Development and Decision Group (Joint Commissioning Team)**

**Date: 14 December 2017**

**Wards Affected: All**

**Report Title: Fostering Service Annual Report 2016/17**

**Is the decision a key decision? No**

**When does the decision need to be implemented? As soon as possible**

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## **1. Proposal and Introduction**

- 1.1 The requirements placed on the Fostering Service are set out in the Fostering Service Regulations (2011), National Minimum Standards (2011) and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (amended). A key part of those requirements is to ensure that the senior leadership and elected members receive regular reports on the service, including resources, performance and outcomes for children and young people.
- 1.2 The report attached at Appendix 1 provides an overview of the Fostering Service for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2017.

## **2. Reason for Proposal**

- 2.1 The Fostering Service is an important component within the Council's Corporate Parenting arrangements for those children who became looked after. It is responsible for:

- Recruitment and assessment of foster carers;
- Support, supervision and training of foster carers including family and friend carers (connected carers) and family to family carers (specific to disabled children and their families)

- Ensuring provision of safe and supportive foster placements which are local for children looked after, providing opportunity to keep siblings together where assessed as being in their best interests
- Promoting placement stability and performance planning
- Private Fostering – where non family members are providing care under a private arrangement

2.2 2016-2017 has been a year of transition and development in response to the Ofsted Inspection published in January 2016. Although the proportion of children looked after in foster care placements has remained broadly in line with other authorities, this masked an ongoing decline in the number of new foster carers being recruited since 2014. Alongside this, foster carers reported that they felt disengaged due to a lack of regular communication with the Council.

2.3 Commencing in November 2016, and meeting on a quarterly basis, a Foster Carers' Forum has now been established bringing together the Head of Service and Team Manager with foster carers. As a result of the increasing trust and confidence, foster carers are more willing to offer placements rather than holding vacancies.

2.4 A further area of progress during 2016/17 was the review of the recruitment and marketing strategy in order to address the decline in numbers experienced over recent years. Initial indications are that the number of new foster carers will increase over 2017/18 and will be reported in the annual report for that year. This is also an important component within the Children's Services Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which seeks to maximise the use of in-house foster carer providers in the best interests of children and efficiency.

2.5 2016/2017 also involved ongoing support from Hampshire colleagues as the DfE appointed improvement partner, with a particular focus on improving practice, recording and analysis. A further area of development is to ensure performance data, currently compiled manually within the service, is fully integrated within the PARIS case management system to enhance senior management oversight and enables earlier intervention when problems emerge.

2.6 The 2016/17 Report also highlights the key areas for development for the current year which aims to consolidate and enhance the progress to date:

- Maintaining positive relationships with foster carers to ensure participation in Practice and Service Improvement
- Driving forward an energetic recruitment campaign to attract prospective foster carers to Torbay Council's Fostering service
- Developing foster carer support groups (to include specific groups for connected carers and family to family), training for foster carers
- Developing systems to ensure data capture is improved and informs service development and reports for the service going forward

- Developing the foster carers' training programme to increase online resources
- Reviewing and developing the foster carers' annual review process

### **3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision**

- 3.1 That the Deputy Mayor be recommended to approve the Annual Fostering Report 2016/17 set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Annual Fostering Report 2016/17