

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Rachel Barnes, Head of Service, Supporting our Children
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	27 March 2024

## PLACEMENT STABILITY FOR FOSTER CARERS

### 1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To consider the specific issue of placement stability and the impact on children, families and foster carers.

### 2.0 Recommendations:

2.1 For the Scrutiny Committee to have oversight of the plans in place to ensure our children experience greater stability in their homes, and to provide scrutiny, challenge and support to aid development and ensure positive outcomes for our children.

### 3.0 Reasons for recommendations:

3.1 To ensure the Committee has an overview of the fostering service within Children's Social Care and can provide a challenge to service provision.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

### 4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

### 5.0 Council Priority:

5.1 The relevant Council Priority is:

- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

## 6.0 Background Information

6.1 Our two key priorities within Children's Services are: supporting more children to stay safely within their families (or to live within a family setting where it is not possible for them to remain with their birth family) and to support more children to effectively engage with education. Should children need to reside outside of their families, foster homes are our preference for them and as such we remain committed to both recruiting and retaining our foster carers.

6.2 These priorities, and our ability to improve the outcomes for children within these areas are inextricably linked. We continue to experience significant challenges in securing education provisions that meet the needs of Our Children and respond to them in a trauma informed manner. Exclusions and reduced timetables have a direct impact on home stability.

Home stability is also impacted by our ability to offer Our Children timely, specialist health intervention or support (most notably mental health support). Sadly, our children with the most complex needs often experience multiple home moves, with a 'start again approach' should they leave their respective health service waiting list.

6.3 Our data shows that we have made significant improvements to the stability we provide to our children who have been in foster care for a longer period of time (2.5 years or more), with a small improvement to our stability for children who have been in our care for 12 months or more.

Feb '24 – 77.8% of our children living with internal foster carers have been in care for 12 months or more and are in the same home for 12 months or more  
Compared to 75% in Feb '23

Feb '24 – 78.3% of our children living with internal foster carers have been in care for 2.5 years or more and in the same home for 2 years or more  
Compared to 56.9% in Feb '23

When considering all of our children (residential, foster care and connected care) 11% of our children have experienced 3 or more homes in the last 12 months (this could include their home with their birth family); compared to our statistical neighbours figure at 10%

6.4 Our efforts to ensure home stability for our children can be summarised within three themes:

1. Reduce the number of children coming in to care
2. Support children and carers to ensure children reside in family settings wherever possible
3. Support children to exit care when safe to do so

6.5 Over the last twelve months we have taken the following actions in order to further improve the stability our children experience:

- Extended the early help offer to provide specific support to foster carers, connected carers and birth family, as well as a review of the times at which we remind carers of this offer.
- Weekly review of children within residential homes chaired by the Head of Service – consideration of those children that may be able to step down to foster homes, birth family or semi-independence.
- Moved the Supporting our Children and Carers Team under Supporting Our Children, offering solution focused interventions to children in our care.
- Funded an additional psychologist post to support our children and their carers.
- New life story policy and launch event – focus on children understanding their family history, why we are involved and why decisions have been made. Children not having this understanding directly impacts on home stability.
- Training to staff to encourage greater collaboration with a child’s birth family; adopting a ‘think family work family’ approach.
- Using our data to focus our interventions; for example children with 2 or more moves and turning 11 years.
- We have been successful in securing a bid for the Regional Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hub and this will go live in May 2024
- Work under way to create satellite hubs under the Mockingbird model, and we hope to launch this end of 2024/early 2025.
- We joined Foster Care Associations in September 2023. This provides support groups for our carers, challenges to our policies and practice, and an opportunity to share good practice.

6.6 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

**7.0 List of Appendices:**

- 7.1 Appendix 7(a): Mockingbird Impact Report 2022  
Appendix 7(b): Regional Fostering Recruitment and Retention Hub - summary slides  
Appendix 7(c): The Mockingbird model – two page summary

**8.0 Financial considerations:**

- 8.1 We have received funding from the DfE for the Fostering Hub and as such there are specific financial considerations for the fostering service. This funding is in place for two years and we will review the impact before considering committing beyond this

time. We have also received DfE funding to implement the Mockingbird model. The cost implications for this are lower, and whilst we are confident that this approach will positively impact on home stability, we will continuously review this impact.

All other support initiatives are incorporated in to existing budgets.

**9.0 Legal considerations:**

9.1 None.

**10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 None.

**11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people:**

11.1 None.

**12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 None.

**13.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:**

13.1 None.

**14.0 Background papers:**

14.1 None.