

Further Analysis of the Fostering Review Proposal

The investment proposal comprises two elements: investment in **Business-as-Usual** activities; and investment in **Service Transformation**.

1. Investment in Business-as-Usual (BAU)

To ensure the foundations for transformation are sound, it is proposed that the service should invest in the following:

Staffing

- **Assessment:** increased staffing of approximately 7 full time equivalent posts, in order to achieve the following:
 - Bringing Viability Assessments within the Fostering service, from child social work teams.
 - Increase in resources within the Reg 24/25 and Connected Persons team.
 - Increased resources to bring back in-house, the currently outsourced assessment work to Independent social workers and / or Casual Bank Staff
- **Support:** increased staffing of approximately 5 full time equivalent posts, in order to achieve the following:
 - Increase in resources for Mainstream / General fostering.
 - Support: Increase in resource to support Special Guardians.

Fostering Panel:

- Extra investment to provide the additional number of panels to manage the increased levels of demand for assessments across Reg24/25 and Kinship. The temporary one-year funding agreed to enable this to happen in 2021/22 ceases in March 2022 and requires to be made permanent.

Special Guardians and Kinship:

- Seeking permanency, through Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) is in most cases the right approach to take. This approach also helps to reduce the number of Children We Care For (CWCF) to a local authority, alongside releasing capacity from independent Reviewing Officers and Social Workers. There is however, often, still a need for the local authority to provide / offer financial support to the carers (SG). The number of years that payment is made, is policy driven and decided by each local authority, and all SGO allowances are also subject to annual financial review. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to assess the support needs of children subject to SGOs and their carers', and review the support being provided. The Council mirrors the national trend of increasing numbers of SGO's being granted, there are currently 544 children subject to SGOs and around 500 Special Guardians (SGs), with the average age of children subject to a SGO being 6 years of age. Currently there are 82 children open to the Kinship Support team averaging around 15% of our SGO Children, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) is currently accessed by 92 children around 17% of our children. This evidences not all Special Guardianship families will

need or want to access post order support and it should be acknowledged that there will be wide variation.

One objective of the restructure will be to review the current SGO Strategy and Policy and propose any potential changes. So when considering the 'As IS' and 'TO BE' Service Structure, it would be appropriate to consider the amalgamation of Kinship Support and Fostering Support. There will be an increased resource to manage the BAU across the service, creating capacity which will be used to take forward training, support groups (informed by demand data) and workshops specifically for Special Guardians.

2. Investment in Transformation

Having established a baseline within the service for its Business as Usual as above, the service has re-defined a new practice model and way of working, to deliver the future vision for fostering services in West Sussex.

The review in Phase 2 has evidenced that a full-service re-design is required, to enable the County Council to turn the tide, become the provider of choice and ensure a sustainable service is provided to CWCF and in-house foster carers.

Included in this proposal are the following contributory elements:

- i) **Business systems:** A new 'hub', which will hold the service together, will provide and manage the business intelligence that will shape and steer the service strategy, from recruitment, support and retention. A new performance management framework will be designed and implemented that supports the service to fully understand all aspects of performance across the whole service and the impact on CWCF, carers and staff.
- ii) **Marketing:** A modern approach to digital content marketing will be employed to recruit more carers that meet the needs of those CWCF. A targeted marketing approach will be taken and lead by the data. Recruitment to Digital Content Lead is critical to success, alongside a performance and data analysis to support the marketing officer to define the targeted campaigns, using an enhanced marketing budget that better meets the scale of requirement for the Council.
- iii) **Re-structure/Re-design:** A formal re-structure will define focused, countywide pre and post approval services. These being Assessment and Support functions. The post approval (Support) function will be strengthened to meet the needs of today's CWCF by implementing an All Four One therapeutic treatment programme, delivered by up to 5 – 8 specialist foster carers, supported by an Occupational Therapist and a small team, therefore enabling those CWCF to step-down from higher cost, less appropriate residential settings.
- iv) **Supporting the Carer community:** Following successful seed funding from Department for Education (DfE) as part of a Southeast regional bid, the County Council has now engaged on the 'Mockingbird' programme. This is a model of practice that nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families, supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. It will provide a more robust support network among carers and help to meet the challenge around retaining carers.
- v) A range of other changes to working practice are proposed.