

North Tyneside Council
Report to Director of Children's Services
Date: 29th August 2023

Title: North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration

Report from Service Area: **Health, Education Care and Safeguarding**

Responsible Officer: **Claire Brodie**
Interim Senior Manager,
Children in Care – 07525813554

Wards affected: **All Wards**

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

In response to the Independent Care Review published February 2021 and the launch of the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy; 'Stable Homes, Built on love' in February 23, the Department for Education (DfE) has committed to recruiting 9,000 foster carers by 2026. The Department is seeking to deliver a holistic package of intervention on a regional basis to support the greatest sufficiency pressures and put in place end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers. Subsequently the DfE have selected the North East as the UK's national pilot pathfinder region for a fully-funded, 1 year project to improve foster carer recruitment and retention and have selected Together for Children Sunderland as the regional implementation lead.

At its meeting on 26 June 2023, Cabinet agreed to the Authority becoming a member of the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) and the regional collaboration for the duration of the 1-year pilot scheme; and authorised the Director of Children's Services to take all necessary steps to enter into a Collaboration agreement with 'Together for Children Sunderland' as regional lead in supporting the development and implementation of the pilot project.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that the Director of Children's Services: -

1. Enter into the regional Collaboration Agreement appended to this report at Appendix 1 ** so that the Authority becomes a member of the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration project scheme.

**** Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.**

1.3 Forward Plan:

Twenty eight days notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 21st July 2023.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report relates to the following priority in the 2021-25 Our North Tyneside Plan:

A caring North Tyneside:

- Our People will be cared for, protected and supported if they become vulnerable including if they become homeless.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

Cabinet on 26th June 2023 agreed to the Authority becoming a member of the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) regional collaboration pilot project for the period of 1 year and further agreed to the Director of Children's Services being authorised to take all necessary steps to ensure that the Authority becomes part of the regional collaboration project, which would include entering into the Collaboration Agreement appended to the report at Appendix 1 on behalf of the Authority.

There is no cost to the Authority by entering into the Collaboration Agreement as the project is fully funded by the Department for Education (DfE). The Collaboration

Agreement at Appendix 1 ** sets out what the Authority, and the other participating local authorities, are required to do as part of the collaboration.

As was explained at Cabinet on 26 June 2023, the pathfinder project and regional Collaboration Agreement are designed to support a regional recruitment process, communications/marketing campaign and training in relation to prospective foster carers.

12 North East local authorities have agreed to enter into the Collaboration Agreement, with Sunderland City Council being the lead Authority, and who have taken the lead in developing the Collaboration Agreement. The Agreement is intended to address the difficulty that exists both nationally and regionally in recruiting foster carers. The pilot project and the Collaboration Agreement, which forms part of the project, is an attempt to tackle that difficulty.

1.6 Decision options:

Option 1

To enter into a Collaboration Agreement at Appendix 1 ** of the report so that the Authority becomes part of the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration for the duration of the one-year of the pilot scheme.

Option 2

Not to enter into the Collaboration Agreement which means that the Authority would not become part of the North East Pathfinder (Foster with North East) Collaboration project scheme.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

The Directors of Children's Services within the region and senior officers from each of the North East local authorities are working with 'Together for Children Sunderland', supporting the development and implementation of the pilot project. The Authority's Cabinet has already agreed that that the Authority should participate in the pilot project. Entering into the Collaboration Agreement will enable the decision taken by Cabinet on 26 June 2023 to be implemented. The Collaboration Agreement is required to be signed by all local authorities in readiness for the launch of the pilot project in September 2023.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix 1 **: Collaboration Agreement – Setting out arrangements for the Regional Fostering Support Hub Pathfinder Project

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

**** Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.**

1.9 Contact officers:

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1.10 Background information:

Report and Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 26TH June 2023 can be accessed via the following weblink: [North Tyneside Council: Decision making](#)

[The Equality Impact Assessment](#)

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

There are no specific financial or resource implications arising from this report. The 1-year pilot scheme will be fully funded by the Department for Education (DfE).

2.2 Legal

The Collaboration Agreement has been reviewed by Legal Services and the Information Governance Team.

The Agreement records the basis on which the twelve local authorities will collaborate to achieve the successful delivery of the Regional Fostering Support Hub Pathfinder Project.

The Lead Authority to implement the project is Together for Children Sunderland Limited. This is a wholly owned company of Sunderland City Council and delivers children's services functions on behalf of Sunderland City Council.

The Project is fully funded by grant funding (for the 2023/24 financial year) which have been awarded to the Lead Authority by the Department for Education. No additional financial contribution is required from the Authority on entering into the Collaboration Agreement during the 2023/24 financial year.

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

The Directors of Childrens Services within the region are working with Together for Children Sunderland, supporting the development and implementation of the pilot project.

As stated, a report was taken to Cabinet on 26 June 2023 regarding this matter setting out the basis on which the North East Authorities would work in collaboration.

2.3.2 External Consultation/Engagement

A cohort of foster carers have been identified within each local authority area to challenge and support the development of the pilot project. A small group of social workers representing each Local Authority will be involved for the duration of the pilot project.

2.4 Human rights

Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights states that everyone has the qualified right to respect for their private and family life. The families of some "Looked after" children may claim to have had that right interfered with. However, that right must be balanced against the rights of children to have a safe and stable home life and that right is promoted if there are more foster carers available in the Borough.

2.5 Equalities and diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken by Sunderland City Council on behalf of the 12 Authorities who are to become part of the pilot scheme and a link to the EIA is provided as a background document as part of the report to Cabinet on 26 June 23. It highlights that an inclusive approach will be adopted to the recruitment of foster carers and how communication will be accessible.

2.6 Risk management

If the Director of Children's Services does not enter into the Collaboration Agreement to enable the Authority to participate in the pilot scheme by the launch date in September 2023, this is likely to impact on this Authority's ability to recruit more foster carers for children who need care in the Borough. The lack of resource for children and young people requiring care is a significant corporate risk in terms of the Authority's statutory responsibilities towards children and the budget pressures that result from the purchase of higher cost foster placements from third party providers. There are no other identified risks.

2.7 Crime and disorder

There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

2.8 Environment and sustainability

There are no specific Environment and sustainability implications arising from this report.

PART 3 – SIGN OFF

- Chief Executive
- Director (s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Assistant Chief Executive