

Cabinet

10 September 2020

Warwickshire Foster Carer Association

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Supports the Warwickshire Foster Carer Association (WFCA) applying for charitable status.
2. Approves and authorises the Strategic Director for People to provide the Warwickshire Foster Carer Association with £15,000 towards their set up costs for establishing the charity for the financial year 2020/21 and to make a further payment of £10,000 to the charity for the year 2021/22, subject to terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of a foster carer association is to promote partnership between Warwickshire County Council foster carers, the Warwickshire County Council fostering team and other relevant agencies, to improve the outcomes for children in care. Historically Warwickshire has had a foster carers' association, but this disbanded a several years ago following a large number of resignations.
- 1.2 In March 2019 the fostering team and WFCA considered a number of WFCA models. The chosen model based on experience in other West Midlands local authorities consists of a local charity set up and facilitated by foster carers which is commissioned by the Local Authority. From research there are over 17 fostering associations in England with local authorities which have charitable status. The amount of money the charities raise and how much the local authority commits from their budget varies considerably. The WFCA and fostering team believe that applying for charity status will allow WFCA to fund raise independently and consequently offer more support to foster carers and children in care.
- 1.3 The Warwickshire Foster Carer Association is now active and meets regularly, it gives foster carers a collective voice, increased participation and partnership working with the Fostering Team and Service as a whole. They are becoming more involved in recruitment events and are holding formal and informal coffee/support groups across the county. The support the

association has offered to carers during the Covid 19 pandemic has been invaluable in helping to keep carers informed and supporting them in gaining appropriate advice and guidance.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 The Fostering Team will allocate £15,000 from its current budget to meet the year one costs of the WFCA. The WFCA will apply for charity status enabling it to fund raise and apply for grants. The fostering team will supply an additional small budget of £10,000 in 2021/22 to the association to meet the cost of social activities for foster carers and children in care including support groups and review this annually for 2022/23 and 2023/24. This costing can be met within the fostering budget. An agreement with the charity setting out terms and conditions for the grant being made will be established between the local authority and the WFCA.

3. Environmental Implications

- 3.1 None

4. Supporting Information

- 4.1 The Warwickshire Foster Carer Association is active. They have their own Facebook pages and are increasing the number of their committee members. We are increasing partnership working with WFCA and they are offering formal and informal support to other foster carers and ultimately improving outcomes for children in care.
- 4.2 The next development is for the WFCA to apply for charity status, to allow them to fund raise independently and have a small budget from WCC. This will enable the charity to develop and implement its business plan and to develop its mentoring and support to foster carers whilst also building a social community for foster carers, their families and children in care. The WFCA will sit independently from the Fostering Team and will apply for their own charitable status.
- 4.3 The association completes the following activities and support for carers and children:
- Inform carers about developments in fostering within Warwickshire as well as nationally.
 - To provide social support and advice on all issues relating to fostering for carers, their families and all CLA. Including a range of support groups, activities and outings.
 - Run drop in mornings and workshops
 - Offer support to prospective foster carers before, at and after fostering panel.
 - Meet on a regular basis as a committee and with the fostering team.
 - Facilitate the foster carers support line- an out of hours service offered to foster carers currently facilitated through EDT.

- Provide articles for the quarterly newsletter
- Support foster carers when they are experiencing an allegation or cause of concern.
- Contribute to the training of foster carers and social workers.
- Support the recruitment activities/events.
- Act as an official channel to scrutinize and advise on policy change
- Consideration could also be given to supporting SGO carers with this model.

4.4 Benefits of the WFCA have been considered, these include:

- Foster carer led service which promotes foster carers' voices and acknowledges their experiences in developing the services
- Increases support to foster carers.
- Potential to improve recruitment and retention.
- Support line and support groups being operated by peers increased confidence for foster carers. Releasing some Family Support Worker time to deliver direct work, delivering targeted intervention.
- Empowers foster carers, increased visibility in the service and helps them to feel valued.
- Improved partnership working and ability to influence the service.
- Ability to raise additional funds through charity status.

4.5 Risks for the County Council and WFCA include:

- Lack of future funding from the authority and from charity applications.
- Commitment to the objectives and ethos of the Warwickshire Foster Carers Association.
- Stability and consistency of the core members of the group.
- Issues in ensuring true representation of Warwickshire Foster carers.
- Potential inability to meet the level of support that is required.
- Lack of engagement from foster carers.
- Commitment required from all levels within the service to work in partnership.

5. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

Decision	Timescale
Enhance WFCA presence to all relevant services	From October 2020 - ongoing
Apply for charity status	By December 2020
Charity to draw up and implement the business plan with cost implications	By November 2020
Regular consultations and review of the effectiveness of the group	Every 6 months

Appendix

WFCAs Annual Report

Background Papers

None

	Name	Contact Information
Report Author	Sharon Shaw	sharonshaw@warwickshire.gov.uk
Assistant Director	John Coleman	johncoleman@warwickshire.gov.uk
Lead Director	Nigel Minns	nigelminns@warwickshire.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services	Cllr Jeff Morgan	cllrjeffmorgan@warwickshire.gov.uk

The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): Cllr Pam Williams, Elected Member appointed to Fostering Panel.