



Tender for External Fostering Placements

Member Briefing

15th June 2022



Essex County Council

What is Fostering?

LA duty under section 22A of the Children Act (1989) to provide accommodation for a 'looked after' child or young person. ECC is the 'corporate parent' for these children and young people.

All children need stability, safety and the chance to grow up in a loving home. Foster care offers children who have had a difficult start in life this opportunity.

Foster Care can be provided via the local authority fostering service ("**internal fostering**") or via Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs or "**external fostering**").

Ofsted inspects LA fostering services as part of the Independent Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection. Fostering services provided by IFAs are inspected as part of the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) inspection of the fostering service.



Types of Foster Care we use at ECC

Internal Fostering – foster carers recruited, assessed, approved, trained and supported by ECC, providing the following placement options:

- Short breaks or respite care
- Short-term fostering for up to a year
- Long term fostering – for as long as the child remains in care
- Fostering children with disabilities
- Emergency fostering
- Parent and child fostering

External Fostering – placements commissioned from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs):

- Foster carers approved, trained and supervised by IFAs.
- ECC only works with providers judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, and those awaiting their first inspection.
- Additional quality assurance via ECC contractual arrangements and performance monitoring
- ECC seeks placements with IFA carers only when a suitable in-house placement is not available.

Recommendation to Cabinet

To launch a tender for a **4-year Framework Agreement** for External Fostering Placements – delivering value for money through transparent costs, greater competition, and clear expectations of how a child's needs will be met.

Evaluation at tender stage using a **30/70 price/quality** model (10% of the quality score assessing social value) – ensuring that providers entering the framework can deliver the most positive outcomes for children and young people.

Evaluation at placement stage using an **80/20 quality/price** model – ensuring that the placement will meet the individual needs of the child.

An **Access Agreement** to enable Southend City Council to use the framework - additional spend makes the Framework more attractive to potential market, therefore ECC will benefit from increased choice and availability.



Commissioning of External Fostering Placements

Benefits of the proposed approach:

- ECC can access a large variety of providers to ensure the placement meets the child or young person's needs.
- Built-in annual refresh enables providers to ensure their costs remain competitive and therefore increase the attractiveness for providers in bidding for call-off placements.
- New providers able to join the framework annually, enabling the Council to benefit from new entrants to the market.
- Access Agreement for SCC to use the framework will increase the overall volume of placements made via the framework making it more attractive to the market.
- Familiar framework call-off procedure for the ECC Children and Young People's Placement Team.
- Increased range of IFA providers on the framework who can offer placements within Essex, therefore contributing towards our ambitions for children to remain close to their families and communities where it is safe for them to do so.



Commissioning of External Fostering Placements

Risks and mitigations:

- Risk: Providers are likely to submit initial pricing based on current cost of living and inflation, which may then be over-inflated if inflation rates subsequently drop.
- Mitigation: The Council has the ability to cap annual price uplifts, for example linked to Consumer Price Index (CPI), mitigating the risk of providers' pricing becoming over-inflated should the cost of living or inflation rates suddenly drop, alongside challenge and review of all requested price increases.

Risks and mitigations:

- Risk: Increasing cost if current inflationary pressures in the wider economy persist in the longer term.
- Mitigation: The Council's Fostering Strategy delivering the planned % increase in-house placements over the lifetime of the framework.