

Scrutiny Review Plan – Form B

This form should be completed by the overview and scrutiny committee after the Scrutiny Review Proposal has been completed and the topic has been included in the work programme of that committee.

Topic title	Support for West Northamptonshire foster carers
Scope	<p>The scrutiny review will consider how foster carers are supported in West Northamptonshire to provide effective care to local Children in Care (CiC). The following is included in the scope of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the challenges for foster carers in West Northamptonshire • Consider ways to increase recruitment and retention of foster carers and understand any barriers and ways we can improve this area • Develop recommendations which can support the quality of service foster carers are able to provide for CiC. <p>The following falls outside the scope of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual complaints • Personal cases which do not have broader impacts <p>The scrutiny review will enable the task and finish panel to produce a report which makes recommendations designed to support recruitment and retention of good foster carers, so that West Northamptonshire Council knows it is providing the best care possible for all CiC.</p>
Link to the Council’s Corporate Priorities (from Form A)	<p>The review will support the Council’s vision to make West Northamptonshire a place where there is opportunity for all – where children are given the best start in life and vulnerable children are supported and protected. A place where all young people grow up qualified and inspired to succeed – because we have retained foster carers, and recruited new ones, thus ensuring a wide pool of foster carers so that children can be placed with a carer that best meets their needs. This meets the Council’s priorities to allow all children to thrive.</p>

<p>Key objectives and measures of effectiveness (from Form A)</p>	<p>The scrutiny review will seek to understand where services work well and where there are areas for improvement. It will use this information to make recommendations intended to help to improve current foster care services in West Northamptonshire where necessary.</p> <p>The scrutiny review will enable the Children, Education and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make key recommendations that will help to recruit more foster carers in West Northamptonshire and to support and retain those already approved, as evidence suggests that foster care is the best way to achieve good outcomes for children in care.</p>
<p>Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key challenges nationally and in West Northamptonshire that can affect the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the quality of care that foster carers are able to provide? What are the key factors that enable foster carers to feel respected, valued and supported in carrying out their roles? • How are foster carers affected by wider local issues which may present challenges when providing care – for example, rising knife crime or problems with accessing health care? • What parts of the support provided to foster carers in West Northamptonshire work well and where are there areas for improvement? What opportunity is there to learn from good practice elsewhere? • How does the operation of an independent fostering agency in Northamptonshire affect the support provided to foster carers? • What plans do West Northamptonshire Council and Northamptonshire Children’s Trust have to improve foster care where necessary, and what actions are being taken to achieve this?
<p>Outlining stakeholders</p>	<p>The task and finish panel will ask to meet representatives from the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northamptonshire Children’s Trust: children’s social care team and independent fostering agency (Recruitment and Post Approval Teams) and Strategic Manager Fostering and Adoption as well as the IFA registered manager and Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association • Designated Safeguarding Leads from schools in West Northamptonshire with experience of working with CiC or foster carers • Stakeholders who support Children in Care (CiC) and interact with carers, e.g. in relation to health, crime, the virtual school and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub • Voluntary organisations who support CiC e.g. Right resolutions • CiC, including the CiC Council.
<p>Outlining evidence</p>	<p>https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/independent-review-csc-england</p> <p>Foster carer recruitment and conversion rates (publishing.service.gov.uk)</p> <p>Corporate Parenting Board KPIs, reports and minutes</p> <p>Virtual School minutes and KPIs</p> <p>Ofsted IFA report relating to fostering in Northamptonshire</p>
<p>Outlining Briefings and/or site visits</p>	<p>Due to the personal nature of this review, site visits will not be necessary.</p>
<p>Risks</p>	<p>There is a risk that stakeholders such as foster carers or CiC might not feel comfortable providing information to the task and finish panel.</p> <p>There is a risk that the scrutiny review might not add value to, or that it might conflict with, corporate work relating to support for foster carers.</p> <p>There is a risk that recommendations from the scrutiny review may not marry with the complicated Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and Fostering Service National Minimum Standards with which the Independent Fostering Service must comply.</p> <p>These risks will be mitigated by an appropriate senior manager from West Northamptonshire Council and Northamptonshire Children’s Trust IFA providing expert advice to the panel and acting as a link to services and stakeholders.</p>

<p>Membership</p>	<p>The task and finish panel will consist of 7 members, drawn from the Children, Education and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other non-executive councillors. The membership should include councillors from both urban and rural areas of West Northamptonshire.</p> <p>The Chair of the panel will be Councillor Louisa Fowler</p>													
<p>Timeframe</p>	<table border="1" data-bbox="592 600 1383 1424"> <tr> <td data-bbox="592 600 991 790">Confirmation of scrutiny review plan by the Children, Education and Housing OS Committee</td> <td data-bbox="991 600 1383 790">25 September 2023</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="592 790 991 864">Scene-setting meeting</td> <td data-bbox="991 790 1383 864">Early October 2023</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="592 864 991 1055">Evidence-gathering (specific dates for meetings and other activity to be set by the task and finish panel)</td> <td data-bbox="991 864 1383 1055">October 2023 – April 2024</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="592 1055 991 1167">Approval of draft report by task and finish panel</td> <td data-bbox="991 1055 1383 1167">May 2024</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="592 1167 991 1312">Agreement of final report by the Children, Education and Housing OS Committee</td> <td data-bbox="991 1167 1383 1312">June 2024</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="592 1312 991 1424">Presentation of final report to the Cabinet</td> <td data-bbox="991 1312 1383 1424">July 2024</td> </tr> </table> <p>The task and finish panel will request that information is provided in reasonable time ahead of its evidence-gathering meetings to assist panel members to prepare and to enable meetings to focus on informed discussion.</p>		Confirmation of scrutiny review plan by the Children, Education and Housing OS Committee	25 September 2023	Scene-setting meeting	Early October 2023	Evidence-gathering (specific dates for meetings and other activity to be set by the task and finish panel)	October 2023 – April 2024	Approval of draft report by task and finish panel	May 2024	Agreement of final report by the Children, Education and Housing OS Committee	June 2024	Presentation of final report to the Cabinet	July 2024
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