



## **THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

**(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)**

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education Decision meeting
<b>Subject:</b>	Mockingbird Update Report
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	20 July 2023
<b>Report by:</b>	Jackie Clark (Service Leader) and Vicky Laybourne (Team Leader)
<b>Wards affected:</b>	ALL

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### **1. Requested by**

This update report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on 28 June 2023. Further that, and in light of the significance of the project in Portsmouth in caring for our children, it is being presented to note.

### **2. Purpose**

To provide an outline of The Mockingbird Project within the Portsmouth Fostering Service and to show the difference this continues to make to children we care for, and to the support our carers receive. The growth of this over recent years has been a significant achievement and the continuation of this is a priority for the service.

### **3. Background**

Mockingbird is an innovative programme for delivering foster care which brings significant benefits to the lives of fostered children and those who look after them. Mockingbird uses an extended family model, in the form of 'constellations' which consist of a 'hub' home and several 'satellite' homes nearby. The specially recruited and trained hub home carers offer respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. Because of its structure, Mockingbird helps alleviate the sense of isolation foster carers can feel and offers immediate practical support - similar to that a non-fostering family might receive from friends and relatives. Continuity of care is one of Mockingbird's underpinning principles, so hub home carers ensure the routines of the children and young people are kept consistent, regardless of where they are staying.



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We first launched Mockingbird in Portsmouth in 2021 and since then the constellations have proved to be a positive addition to our Foster Carer support and wrap around support to the children we care for. It is a model based on strengthening relationships and has shown to improve placement stability and relationships with birth families.

Portsmouth remains the pioneers of the South Coast, with the successful development of 5 Mockingbird constellations across the city and beyond. We have launched 5 constellations since January 2021, these are comprised of 48 foster carers and 65 children.

- North constellation launched in January 2021
- Gosport and Fareham constellation launched in July 2021
- Central Portsmouth constellation launched in July 2021
- Havant and Waterlooville constellation launched in September 2022
- Southsea constellation launched in March 2023

#### **4. Benefits of Mockingbird to Portsmouth, linking to our Corporate Parenting Strategy:**

##### **Strengthening Relationships**

The model is providing an extended family to the children of the constellations. They are having the opportunity to make friends and connections with positive adults. Several of the children in the constellation struggle to build relationships and friendships with their peers but through Mockingbird they have been able to experience sleepovers and going for tea with a friend. The significance of these events cannot be underestimated! The children have met up at parks, play centres, Flip Out amongst other places for their social activities. They are enjoying being part of a community where they accepted. The Hub Carers have provided on average 4 sleepovers per week to the children of the constellations.

Positive family contact has taken place at the Hub homes whereas previously it had been at Battenburg Family Centre. The Hub Carers have facilitated family time in the Hub Home and in the community with multiple families. One of our Hub Carers has provided family time with a child, mother and sibling in the Hub home and has facilitated time for a grandmother to meet with her granddaughter in the community. Another Hub Carer has supported a family member care for her sister, and although this was not sustainable, she felt supported which ensured their relationship could be maintained.

The feedback from the families has been really positive and they are enjoying family time in a natural environment where the children are safe whilst having normalised family time together.



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### **Placement stability**

Since the launch of all five of the constellations more children have the security and support of Mockingbird. Through offering emotional and practical support placements for children have stabilised. This is because the children are able to spend time with the Hub Carers, whom they have a relationship with. The Hub Carers are able to offer time and space for carers and children to reflect and start to rebuild and restore relationships. The Hub Carers have offered extended stays to children where relationships have broken down. The Hub Carers offer consistency of care to these children, and whilst the aim is always to rebuild the relationship if this isn't an option the children are looked to be matched with other satellite carers within the same constellation or a carer is joined to ensure the children have the security of the safe adults around them in the constellation. There have been numerous households who have required intensive support and without the Hub Carers in Mockingbird the placements for children may have broken down, which would have resulted in them having to move to alternative foster homes, IFA placements or residential homes.

There have been placements for children, which have sadly broken down, even with the support of the Hub Carers. It is evident for these children a foster home setting has not been able to meet their needs and alternative provisions have been sought; however, the Hub Carers and satellite carers maintain contact with the children, via phone calls and visits. It is hoped these continuing relationships will enable the children to return to the constellation in the future.

The feedback from CAMHS colleagues has suggested that the impact of placement breakdown within Mockingbird constellations does not appear to have the same effect on the children. This is because the children, where possible, remain within the same constellation and continue to be supported by the Hub Carers and satellite carers, ensuring relationships can be maintained.

### **Recruitment and retention of carers**

Both Hub Carers and Satellite carers are supportive of one another and through meeting up and training they are building bonds which ensure they do not feel isolated and have support 24/7. There have been a number of carers who have stated if they did not have the support of Mockingbird they may have left fostering. It is particularly supportive for new foster carers who have the benefit of being able to gain advice and support from other more experienced carers.



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### **Support and training of Carers**

Many new carers expressing their desire to join Mockingbird when coming through panel because of the sense of community and support.

- TIMOC training completed with the constellations.
- Therapeutic Carers training for the constellations has been completed.
- Strengthening Relationship training has been completed.
- Regular reflective sessions facilitated by the Mockingbird Liaison Team Leader. These sessions have helped to build a sense of community and a space to reflect on what has gone well, what has been challenging and important topics including trauma informed practices.

### **Learning So Far**

It is evident from our constellations that it is vital there is 'wiggle room' should children need to be cared for by alternative carers. This has been highlighted time and time again within all the constellations. Another important factor is the matching process not only for children but for carers within a constellation. The group need to be able to support one another and have varying skills and diversity. There is evidence from one of the current constellations to suggest that if a satellite carer is not fully invested in the group it can have a negative impact on the whole group. This is a challenge and careful supervision is required for it not to become a block on the group forming and building vital relationships. There has been additional pressure on the Hub Carers over the last few months, which has required them to care full time for children in the constellations on occasions. This has had an impact on the support the Hub Carers can offer the satellite carers at times. This will be closely monitoring moving forward to avoid the risk of the Hub Carers having excess demand and the constellation not getting the support they need to maintain placements for children.

It is evident that within Mockingbird the training offer has been successful with high attendance rates. This is due to the carers feeling safe in their support networks to access training and fully engage as a group. This is an area for development within the wider service.

Signed by Sarah Daly, Director, Children, Families and Education.



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**Appendices:**

**Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972**

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location