

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 21 July 2014

Subject: Quarter One Report on the Fostering Service

Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services

Summary: The report outlines the activities in the Fostering Service during the first three months of the new financial year 2014 - 2015.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council's Medium Term Plan Priority C Promote Health and Well-being.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Financial:

1. For the new financial year 2014/2015 the Adoption and Fostering within Children's Services has a combined annual budget of £8,044,710.

Legal:

2. Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of the services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the services are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Risk Management:

3. Regulatory Risks: Failure to report to Members would be a breach of National Minimum Standard.

Staffing:

4. Currently there are 14.3 FTE social workers within the service, 1.5 FTE social work assistants, 1 FTE Marketing Officer and 1 FTE Training Officer supporting the service in relation to recruitment/training and placements. 2 FTE administrators also support the 2 fostering teams.
5. The Fostering Service comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service. The staffing structure of the Fostering Service is still under review with some adjustments are expected by September 2014.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Fostering Service provided to Looked After Children affects all sectors of communities.

Community Safety:

7. Not applicable

Sustainability:

8. Not applicable

Procurement:

9. Not applicable

RECOMMENDATION:

- **That the Corporate Parenting Panel note the content of the report.**

Background

10. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant Regulations and National Minimum standards require Local Authority Fostering Service to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly update to the Corporate Parenting Panel and a full year Annual Report to this Panel and the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee each year.
11. This is the first report for the financial year 2014/2015.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

12. During April, May and June 2014 a number of recruitment activities/events took place, in line with the fostering service recruitment strategy. These included attendance at Flitwick indoor market, Flitwick Carnival, Houghton Regis 'Pride' event, stalls at Asda in Dunstable and Waitrose in Ampthill, Leighton and

Linslade May Fayre, Armed Forces Day, attendance at a Joint Fostering and Adoption event with Luton Borough Council and other events in Shefford and Flitwick.

13. On going promotion of the Fostering Service took place on Facebook from 14 April to 09 May and on 14 May 2014 the Fostering Service's own Facebook page went live. Posts on the website informed viewers of the forthcoming outreach work taking place. Tweets occurred during the Lorraine Pascale documentary about being fostered in June 2014. There was also an article written for News Central which contained an interview with Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers about what it is like to foster.
14. The drive to recruit more foster carers was also highlighted in the Director of Children's Services regular newsletter.
15. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we had a total of 86 enquiries about fostering. There were 20 in April (compared to 14 for the same period last year when the service was a joint one), 45 in May (compared to 15 for the same period last year) and 21 in June (compared to 15 for the same period last year). There were 35 Initial Visits allocated during this period, 14 for April, 16 for May and 5 for June. There were 5 application forms received; 2 for April and 3 in May.

Assessments

16. As of the 30 June 2014 there were 23 assessments under way. 10 were for general fostering, 2 were for family link, 2 were emergency regulation 24 assessments (family and friends), 5 were full family and friends' assessments, 2 were Special Guardianship Order assessments and 2 were private fostering assessments.
17. During this quarter 5 families were approved to foster, 4 were to provide family and friends care and 1 was to provide short term/respice care. Two sets of family/friends carers (connected persons) were approved at Fostering Panel during this period. As of the 30 June 2014 the service had 92 fostering households (63 mainstream and 29 family and friends) and there were 6 private fostering arrangements.

Referrals/placements

18. During April, May and June 2014, 13 new fostering placements were made, 10 of these children were placed with in house foster carers, 2 went to I.F.A.'s and 1 was placed with a family member as an emergency under regulation 24. 14 placements ended during this period, 7 because a Special Guardianship or Residence Orders were granted, 5 returned home to birth family and 2 moved into adoptive homes.
19. At of 30 June 2014 there were a total of 86 children living with in-house foster carer, 6 children were placed with Bedford Borough foster carers and 108 children were in Independent Fostering Provision (IFA).

Training

20. During April, May and June 2014, 13 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as childcare emergency first aid, allegations, bereavement, life story work, managing and supporting transitions and endings, safer caring, evidencing fostering standards and delegated authority.
21. There were 62 households who had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards. 12 households were overdue in completing these standards. Social Workers and the training officer have been putting in additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

Ofsted notifications

22. Whenever a significant event happens, i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs, the agency has to report these to Ofsted. During this period there were 4 Ofsted notifications, 3 for young persons going missing, (2 were for the same young person going missing) and 1 was due to a child protection concern (s47 investigation, the outcome of this allegation was substantiated). The case where there was a child protection concern was due to issues of emotional and physical abuse. The Police did not prosecute the alleged perpetrators due to a lack of evidence; these Carers were de-registered on 02 July 2014. The children were removed to Independent Fostering Agency carers in the area.

Allegations

23. There were 3 allegations made against 3 households during April, May and June 2014. 2 were due to emotional and physical abuse allegations and 1 was due to hygiene and the presentation of issues of the child. The outcome in the first 2 cases was that the children were moved to alternative placements as there was evidence to support some of the allegations. The outcome in the case with hygiene issues was that the carer was advised to manage the care of the child more closely and this child remained with the carer.

Complaints

24. There were 3 complaints made about the service during this period. 1 was in relation to the panel process/conflict of interest due to staff personal knowledge of the person attending panel; this complaint outcome was upheld. 1 was a complaint from a person who was not approved as a Regulation 24 carer and who disagreed with the assessment of them and information included in the report. 1 was from a carer who felt her initial complaint had not been taken seriously or dealt with quickly enough. This complaint was partly upheld in relation to some delays taking place but not upheld in relation to the complaint not being taken seriously.

Next Steps

25. The service will continue to focus on recruiting more foster carers as this is our key priority.
26. The other main areas of focus for the teams over the coming months will be the Frameworki and business processes, raising practice standards, partnership and collaborations.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None