
Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 1 December 2014

Subject: Quarter Two Report on the Fostering Service

Report of: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services

Summary: The report outlines the activities in the Fostering Service during the second quarter (July-September 2014) of the financial year 2014-2015.

Advising Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations

Contact Officer: Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering

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 Wellbeing.

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 financial year 2014/2015 Adoption and Fostering Service 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 outcome of the Services, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the Services are effective and achieving good outcome for children.

Risk Management

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

Staffing

4. Currently there are 14.3 FTE Social Workers with the Service, 1.5 FTE Social Work Assistant, 1 FTE Marketing Recruitment Officer and 1 FTE Training Co-ordinator supporting the Service in relation to recruitment, training and placements, 2 FTE Administrators also support the two Fostering Teams.
5. The Fostering Service comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service. The management of the Fostering Service has recently been amended, with the Fostering Manager being appointed as the Practice Manager and the 2 Deputy Managers being appointed into Manager roles.

Equality/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 notes the content of the report.**

Background

10. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated relevant Regulations and National Minimum Standards require the Local Authority Fostering Service to report to Members at three monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly reports.

This is the second quarter report for the financial year 2014/2015.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

11. During July, August and September a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Service recruitment strategy.
12. Outreach events included attendance at Wootton Family Fun Day; Church End Lower School Fete, Marston Moretaine; Party in the Park, Dunstable; ASDA, Dunstable; Pride in Stotfold Day; a classic car show in Houghton Regis and an information evening was held in Bedford for prospective foster carers.
13. Various leaflet drops took place in Luton, Maulden, Westoning, Stotfold, Silsoe, Barton-le-Clay and Houghton Regis. Leaflets were also put in goodie bags at a foster carers fundraising event and at another fundraising event held by Keech Hospice.
14. Leaflet and poster packs were sent to six new Churches for display purposes. Leaflets and poster packs were also sent to South Beds Circuit Administrator for distribution to Tesco and Sainsbury's in Dunstable and have been placed in all the local libraries around the County. The Fostering Team have also entered into a two year sponsorship deal with Eaton Bray's Lions Football Team.
15. In relation to on-line recruitment there have been ongoing posts on Facebook promoting the fees scheme, the celebration of Fostering Event held in September and advertising forthcoming information evenings.
16. With regard to press activity, advertisements were placement in Bedford Times and Citizen, Biggleswade Chronicle, Bedford on Sunday and Leighton Buzzard Observer. A write up of the celebration of fostering event was also included in Bedfordshire of Sunday.
17. Separate interviews took place with a foster carer and with the Fostering Manager and the write up of these interviews were placed in the Staff Central magazine.
18. As a result of the recruitment drive during their period we received a total of 47 enquiries about fostering. There were 19 in July, 4 in August and 24 in September. There were 20 initial visits allocated during this period, 8 for July, 8 for August and 4 for September. There were 11 application forms received during this period, 2 for July, 6 for August and 3 for September.

Assessments

19. As of the 30 September 2014 there were 30 assessments in progress; 15 of these were for mainstream fostering, 6 were temporary assessments of Family and Friends carers (Reg. 24), 4 were full Family and Friends assessments, 2 were Private Fostering assessments and 3 were Special Guardianship Orders assessments.

20. During this quarter 5 families were approved to foster, 4 were to provide mainstream short term and respite care and 1 family were approved as Family and Friends carers.
21. As of the 30 September 2014 the Service had 92 fostering households (compared to 93 in April). 67 of these carers were mainstream (compared to 68 in April) and 25 Family and Friends/Reg. 24 (which is the same as in April).
22. As of the 30 September the Service were supporting 2 Private Foster carers and between them were caring for 6 children. 2 further Private Fostering Referrals were received in September relating to 2 children. One of the assessments was started in September, but the other applicant did not respond to our requests to meet with him and appropriate action was taken to progress this. All statutory visits concerning Private Fostering were 100% complaint with regards to timescales.
23. As of the 30 September there were 102 Special Guardianship Orders (S.G.O.'s) in place (compared to 88 at the end of April). This figure impacts on the overall total of foster carers as it means that 14 family and friends carers would have had their approval terminated when their S.G.O.'s were granted. During this period the Service worked with about 6 Special Guardianship Order families supporting them in relation to issues such as contact, managing children's behaviour or requests for funding.

Referrals/Placement

24. During July, August and September 33 new fostering placements were made; 11 in July. 19 in August and 3 in September. This is an increase of 20 new placements made compared to the last quarter. Out of the 33 new placements, 24 were placed in-house. Out of the 9 children placed with IFA carers, 2 were placed by the Emergency Duty Team following a Police Protection Order being taken out of office hours. 4 of the remaining 7 children were a sibling group needing to be placed together and there were no in-house carers who could accommodate a large sibling group.
25. During this period 16 placements ended; 8 because S.G.O's were granted, 5 returned home, 2 were adopted and 1 young person moved into independence.
26. As of the 30 September 2014 there were a total of 99 children living with in-house foster carers compared to 86 in the last quarter. The Service was also providing short term placements for 4 children from either Bedford Borough or Luton Borough Council.

Training

27. During July, August and September 10 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as first aid, caring for babies withdrawing from drugs and alcohol, supporting the health of looked after children, attachment and brain development, identity and attachment, welcoming a foster child, hidden harm: the impact of drugs and alcohol on families, skills to foster and adoption

preparation training. Bespoke training was also provided for 2 families regarding crisis intervention.

28. Some of the training provided was open to foster carers from other Local Authorities and a number of carers from Bedford Borough, Luton and Milton Keynes attended training which enabled the Service to generate a small income.
29. As of the 30 September there were 69 fostering households who had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards; 14 households were yet to complete their portfolios, but still had time to address within the required timescale. 5 households were overdue in completing the TSD Standards and were outside the requirement timescale. Social Workers and the Training and Development Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

Ofsted Notifications

30. Whenever a significant event happens, i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious incident/accident occurs, the agency have to report these to Ofsted. During this period there were 11 notifications; 2 in July where a child broke their wrist while skate boarding and 1 young person who went missing (for less than twenty-four hours). In August there were no notifications, although in September there were 9 notifications involving 2 young people; 1 went missing a total of 7 times (for less than twenty-four hours) and the other young person went missing twice (once for less than twenty-four hours and once between one-six days).

Allegations

31. There were no allegations made against foster carers between July and September.

Complaints

32. The Fostering Service received two complaints between July and September. one was in relation to a member of staff, this could not be investigated fully as the staff member has been off sick during this period. The other was from a family member of a child in care regarding the standard of care provided by the foster carer. Some of the issues raised were to do with the carers choice of shoes for the child, some miss fitting sandals, miscommunication regarding contact issues and inappropriate language/messages being used with the child. This complaint was dealt with in timescale and some of the issues were upheld and others were not. The carers have been spoken to about the areas of the complaint that were upheld and have changed their practice as a result.

Compliments

33. During this period staff within the Service received 4 compliments from foster carers in relation to the support they received.

Great Dads Award

34. In July Central Bedfordshire presented the "Great Dads" Award. There were 7 winners 4 of whom came from the Fostering Service, i.e.3 foster carers and 1 private foster carer.
35. In September Central Bedfordshire held a 'Celebration of Fostering' event which was held at Woburn Safari Park. It was held in recognition of those carers who had been fostering for many years. In addition, Certificates and gift baskets were presented to foster carers in the following categories:
 - Outstanding contribution to caring for children with disabilities.
 - Outstanding contribution to fostering.
 - My brilliant foster carer.
 - My brilliant family and friends foster carer
36. The foster carers who attended brought their foster children and birth children with them and enjoyed the festivities. They were treated to a parrot show, a reptile and snake encounter, a delicious BBQ and music at the end. Excellent feedback was received from a large number of foster carers and staff who attended the event.

Conclusion

37. The main focus has been to recruit more foster carers and this will continue in order to meet the target of recruiting 10 more foster carers (net gain) by the end of the financial year.
38. The number of foster carers has not increased since April; some of this is to do with the fact that at least 14 of our foster carers have been de-registered as S.G.O.'s are granted for these carers. This means that in order for the service to make a net gain of 10 foster carers we have to at least replace these 14 before we are even back to an even starting point.
39. The fees scheme has, however, meant that the service is now able to compete with its neighbouring Local Authorities and with I.F.A.'s. This has not been the case previously and was reflected in the high percentage of children in I.F.A. placements compared to in house.
40. Whilst the number of foster carers has not increased the number of placements in house has. The service is now caring for 99 children in house compared to 86 in June and 85 in April. There are, therefore, 14 more in house placements than there were at the start of the financial year which will be helping to make significant savings in relation to I.F.A. spend. This increase has been achieved mainly because of the fees scheme, for example, where a carer has now been able to give up work and therefore care for more children than they previously could or because we have been able to expand our foster carers approval so that they are now more able to consider children outside their previously limited approval range.

41. Added to this the service is currently assessing 15 prospective foster carers who all have panel dates booked in before the end of March 2015 where they will hopefully be approved.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None