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**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date:** 02 February 2015

**Subject:** Quarter Three Fostering Service Report

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

**Summary:** The report outlines the activities in the Fostering Service during the third quarter (October-December) of the financial year 2014-2015.

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Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Operations

Advising Officer: Annie Craig, Fostering Service Manager

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. The Fostering Agency comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service and the Head of Service has overall management responsibility for Fostering. Under the Head of Service is the Practice Manager who is also the registered manager for Fostering. This person monitors and manages the activities of the fostering agency. She supervises 2 team managers who have day to day responsibility for management of the 2 fostering teams. Currently there are 14.3 FTE Social Workers with the Service, 1.5 FTE Social Work Assistant, 1 FTE Marketing Recruitment Officer, 1 FTE Training Co-ordinator a part time panel adviser and 2 panel secretaries supporting the Service in relation to recruitment, training, panel and placements, 2 FTE Administrators also support the two Fostering Teams.

### **Equality/Human Rights**

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

### **Community Safety**

6. Not applicable.

### **Sustainability**

7. Not applicable.

### **Procurement**

8. Not applicable.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes the content of the report.**

### **Background**

9. The Children Act 2004, Care Standards Act 200 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 third quarter report for the financial year 2014/2015.

## **Recruitment of Foster Carers**

10. During October, November and December a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Service recruitment strategy.
11. Outreach events included attendance at a Health and Wellbeing event at RAF Henlow, a recruitment stall at Luton and Dunstable hospital, Morrison's in Houghton Regis, Waitrose in Ampthill and a food bank coffee morning in Wootton. Information evenings were also held in Bedford and Dunstable.
12. Various leaflet drops took place in Sainsbury, Morrison's and Asda stores in Bramingham, Luton, Shefford, Houghton Regis and Biggleswade. Posters and leaflets were delivered to Costa Coffee shops in Bedford, Ampthill, Luton and Dunstable, to Keech Hospice in Luton as well as to garden centres in Flitwick and Wixham. 'Fostering as a career' posters were designed with the aim of putting in job centres around the county in January 2015, timescales of these still needs to be agreed.
13. In relation to press coverage, an article regarding the foster carers' celebration event went in Dunstable Today and Biggleswade Today. Coverage of the National Sons and Daughters Awards went into Bedford and Times Citizen (print and online) and the Dunstable Gazette (print and online). A Fostering article aimed at child-minders was placed in the Early Years Newsletter and an article about fostering was placed in the Winter Church Magazine which was distributed to 700 households in Stotfold. BBC 3 Counties interviewed a foster carer who received a National Award regarding her outstanding contribution to fostering. Coverage of the foster carer receiving this award was also placed in Bedford and Times Citizen (print and online) as well as Bedford Today 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.
14. On line posts were placed on Facebook advertising outreach events/Christmas activities and advertising/promoting fostering for Central Bedfordshire Council. Further posts were placed advertising Information evenings and the fees scheme. A further post was placed with scanned jigsaw pieces where LAC anonymously write their views on what foster carers have done, were doing and could do to make a difference to their lives.
15. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we received a total of 35 enquiries. There were 19 in October, 6 in November and 10 in December. There were 17 initial visits allocated during this period, 10 in October, 5 in November and 2 in December. There were 7 application forms received during this period, 1 for October, 4 for November and 2 for December.

## **Assessments**

16. As of the 31 December 2104 there were 28 assessments under way, 14 for career carers, 4 Regulation 24 (emergency family and friends), 3 full family and

friends/connected persons and 7 Special Guardianship Order (S.G.O) assessments.

17. During this quarter 4 families were approved to foster, 2 were as career carers to provide short/long term care, 1 was a career carer to provide family link for children with disabilities and 1 was as a family and friends carer.
18. As of the 31 December 2014 the Fostering Agency had 98 fostering households (compared to 95 in April). 71 of these carers were mainstream (compared to 68 in April) and 27 Family and Friends/Reg. 24 (compared to 25 in April).
19. As of the 31 December 2014 the Agency were supporting 3 Private Foster carers and between them were caring for 7 children.
20. As of the 31 December 2014 there were 106 S.G.O's in place (compared to 88 at the end of April). The majority of the S.G.O. orders were granted to Family and Friends foster carers so the children they cared for were no longer classed as looked after. Had the status of these children's placements not transferred to S.G.O.'s the number of children in care would have significantly increased.

### **Referrals/Placement**

21. During October, November and December 18 new fostering placements were made; 9 in October, 3 in November and 6 in December. This is a decrease of 15 new placements made compared to the last quarter. Out of the 18 new placements 14 were placed in-house. All of the 4 children placed with I.F.A. carers were placed by the Emergency Duty Team when the office was closed.
22. During this period 16 placements ended; 5 because SG.O.'s were granted; 2 because Child Arrangement Orders were granted, 6 returned home and 3 were adopted.
23. As of the 31 December 2014 there were a total of 100 children living with in-house foster carers compared to 91 in December 2013. This is a positive increase in in-house provision as it means 10% more children have been placed in in house provision rather than with I.F.A.'s. As of the 31 December 2014 there were a total of 86 children in I.F.A. placements compared to 108 in December 2013. This means our reliance on I.F.A. placements has reduced by 22% and we now have significantly more children placed in house than with I.F.A.'s. In December 2013 only 45% of our children were placed in house this figure is now 54%.

### **Training**

24. During October, November and December 17 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as first aid, therapy, Crisis intervention, safeguarding on line, supporting educational potential, ADHD, contact, working with birth parents, skills to foster and family and friends preparation.

25. Some of the training provided was open to foster carers from other Local Authorities and a number of carers from Bedford Borough and Luton attended training which enabled the Service to generate a small income.
26. As of the 31 December 2014 there were 71 fostering households who had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD); 14 households were yet to complete their portfolios, but still had time to address within the required timescale. 3 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**

27. 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 notifications; 3 in October (2 regarding a young person who went absent from his placement for or a week and another concerning a young person who went absent twice for less than 24 hours). There were none in November and 1 in December (a young person went absent from placement for less than 24 hours). All young persons who have been missing are referred to the return interview service.

### **Allegations**

28. There was 1 allegation made during this period. In October a grand daughter of a family and friends foster carer said the carer had smacked her (the child was not a Looked After Child (LAC). The Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) was consulted who agreed the matter should be dealt with by the supervising social worker. A Joint Evaluation Meeting (J.E.M.) was also held in December concerning a foster carer who showed poor judgement in managing a young person's challenging behaviour and reacted with the use of an inappropriate physical intervention towards the young person. Appropriate strategies were put in place to support the carer to manage the young person's behaviour and prevent further incidents happening again.

### **Complaints**

29. No complaints about the fostering service were received during this period.

### **Compliments**

30. During this period the agency received 6 compliments; 4 in November and 2 in December. The compliments in November included 1 foster carer attending panel who advised that she had 'the best supervising social worker she had ever had'. While completing an S.G.O. assessment on a private foster carer the applicant and children all spoke highly of the worker from the fostering team who had supported them and stated 'they would be sad when her involvement ended'. An Independent Reviewing Officers (I.R.O.) rang one of our foster carers to thank her for 'their excellent care of D and for the marvellous book

that they sent with him full of memories'. An assessing social worker from the fostering team also received an email from a family and friends carer which stated 'we would like to express our thanks for your help, guidance and understanding through what has been a difficult and often tearful assessment'. In December, 1 of the compliments was from an I.R.O. regarding the positive care provided by a foster carer, the other compliment was from a carer who had recently obtained an S.G.O. who stated 'a massive thank you for everything you have done for us and for E, words cannot describe how we feel'.

31. As well as the compliments received in October, 3 of our sons and daughters of foster carers received national awards from the Fostering Network for their contribution to their fostering family. An awards ceremony was held and the children were presented with their certificates and trophies by the Director of Children's Services. In December, 1 of our foster carers also received a national award from the Fostering Network for her outstanding contribution to fostering. An awards ceremony was held for her where, again, the Director of Children's Services presented her with her certificate and trophy.

## **Conclusion**

32. In conclusion it has been another busy quarter. The main focus of our work has been to recruit more foster carers and will continue to be so in order to meet our target of recruiting 10 more foster carers (net gain) by the end of the financial year.
33. The number of foster carers has increased (net gain) by 3 since April 2014, there are potentially 8 more foster carers being presented to panel between January and March 2015, which will hopefully help to ensure we reach the target of 10 additional foster carers. This is, however, dependent on how many of our current family and friends carers placement status change as they proceed with S.G.O. assessments. Regardless of the target set, the Fostering Agency, along with the support of the Placement and Resource Team, has been successful in expanding the approval range/capacity of our in house foster carers. The fees scheme has helped to encourage existing foster carers to consider giving up work and take on more children, which has reduced our reliance on I.F.A. placements and therefore reduced placement costs significantly. As referred to paragraph 23, we now have 54% of children placed with in-house carers compared to 45% for the same time last year. With further foster carers due to be presented to panel shortly, it is envisioned our use of I.F.A. placements will reduce further.
34. The fees scheme has also meant that the agency is now able to compete with neighbouring Local Authorities and with I.F.A.'s and this is evidenced in the number of I.F.A. carers who are now approaching C.B.C. with a view to transferring.

**Appendices:**

None

**Background Papers:**

None