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## FOSTERING AGENCY 2014/2015 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Report of Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing  
(carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers: Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services  
(sue.harrison@central.bedfordshire.gov.uk)

Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering  
(annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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### Purpose of this report:

For the Panel to note the contents and agree the Fostering Agency 2014/15 Quarter 4 Performance Report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency 2014/15 Quarter 4 Performance Report.

### Background

1. 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 fourth quarter report for the financial year 2014/2015.

### Recruitment of Foster Carers

2. During January, February and March 2015, a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
3. Outreach including attendance at 2 Child-minders support groups; a Community Engagement event at DISC (Defence Intelligence & Security Centre); Bedford Hospital; Luton & Dunstable Hospital; Vilukush Sheikh Women's Group; an Inspire event targeting people from LGTB (Lesbian

Gay Transgender and Bisexual) and at an Integrated Youth Service staff meeting where leaflets and flyers were handed out. An information evening about fostering was also held in Flitwick.

4. In relation to advertising, an advert was placed on Heart FM Radio looking at the rewards of fostering from the foster carers perspective. This was as a follow up from an advert placed in December which focussed on fostering from the child in care perspective.
5. Leaflets and posters were sent to: Bedford Italian Society; Bedford African and Caribbean Forum; Bedford Polish Society; Bedford Council of Faiths; Shefford Scouts; a Turkish School where one of our LAC children attends; Under 18's football clubs in the CBC/Luton area; to 7 Youth Zones (Youth clubs) in the Luton area; to Red MV, which is a youth organisation that provides training and events for young people; Sainsbury's in Biggleswade; Tesco (in Dunstable Bedford and Shortstown); Potton Baptist Church; Biggleswade Youth Club and more leaflets and posters were delivered to Keech Hospice in Luton. Posters and Leaflets were sent electronically to Bedfordshire Clinical Group so that they could distribute posters electronically to all GP surgeries. On-line advertisements were also placed in Bedford and Dunstable Today as well as on-line advertisements in Bedford Times and Citizen and Luton News advertising forthcoming Information Evenings.
6. On-line posts on Facebook have been promoted throughout this quarter either advertising forthcoming Information Evenings/Events or promoting the need to recruit foster care from the general public. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we received a total of 56 enquiries (21 more than in the last quarter). There were 36 in January, 7 in February and 13 in March. There were 29 Initial Visits during this period, 8 in January, 12 in February and 9 in March. There were 8 application forms received during this period. 1 for January, 6 for February and 1 for March (1 more than in the last quarter).

## **Assessments**

7. As of the 31 March 2015 there were 20 assessments in progress, 7 for career carers, 2 Regulation 24 (emergency family and friends), 7 full family and friends/connected persons and 4 SGO (Special Guardianship Order) assessments.
8. During this quarter 12 families were approved to foster, 8 were career carers providing a variety of long term, short term, respite or emergency care, 4 family and friends carers were approved to care for a total of 6 children.
9. As of the 31 March 2015 the Fostering Agency had a total of 105 fostering households (compared to 95 at the end of March 2014). 77 of these carers were career carers (compared to 68 at the end of March

2014) and 28 Family and Friends/Regulation 24 (compared to 25 at the end of March 2014).

10. At the beginning of April 2014 the Fostering Agency were set a target to recruit a 10 net gain of foster carers for the year. This target has been met. Not only has this target been met but the service has significantly increased the number of placements provided in house compared to children being placed in Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements.

Date:	In House Placements	IFA Placements
As 1/4/2014	93 = 46%	108 = 54%
As 31.3.2015	106 = 54%	90 = 46%
	Increase = 14%	Decrease = 17%

This has been achieved not only by the increase in the number of career carers being approved, but also being able to support the current in house foster carers to consider changes in their approval so as to enable them to care for a wider variety of children and increase the number of children they can care for. This has enabled CBC to make significant savings in terms of placement costs as more children have been accommodated in house which is a much cheaper option than placing children in IFA placements. As a result of this success a further full time equivalent supervising social worker will need to be budgeted for in the near future in order to be able to appropriately support the additional foster carers being approved.

11. Up until mid February 2015 the Fostering Service were supporting 3 Private Foster Carers who between them were caring for 7 children. Private Fostering is now managed by the Family Support Service who take responsibility for assessing and supporting Private Foster Carers as well as promoting Private Fostering with other professionals and the general public.
12. As at 31 March 2015 there were 114 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) in place (compared to 81 at the end of March 2014). The majority of the SGO's granted were to Family and Friends and 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 SGO's, the number of children in care would have increased significantly.

### **Referrals/Placement**

13. During January, February and March 35 new fostering placements were made; 14 in January, 12 in February and 9 in March. This is an increase of 17 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 35 new placements, 27 were placed in-house. The young people placed in IFA placements were mainly asylum seekers who needed carers who could better meet their cultural/language needs i.e. Turkish and Kurdish young

people. There was also an Asian/Pakistani sibling group of 3 that needed to be placed together, but there were no suitable in-house resource. This figure also included a 15 year old young person who was placed in a parent and child placement with her new born baby.

## **Training**

14. During January, February and March 16 training courses took place. Courses covered topics such as first aid, Asperger's and Autism, TSD (Training Standard and Development) standards, delegated authority, safer caring supporting the health of LAC, contact and working with birth families, allegations, crisis intervention, managing and supporting transition and endings, hidden harm, impact of drugs and alcohol use on families, supporting educational potential, Family and Friends preparation training and skills to foster preparation training.
15. As of the 31 March there were 69 fostering households that had completed their mandatory TSD standards; 21 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 2 households were overdue in completing the TSD standards and were outside the required timescale. Social workers and the Training and Development Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

## **Ofsted Notifications**

16. 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 2 notifications; both in February. The first one was a young person who absconded from their placement. Initially his whereabouts were unknown but the police identified where he was staying, however, after visiting the young person and completing a risk assessment the young person remained and did not return to the foster placement.
17. The second notification was in relation to a young person who left school without authorisation and did not return to the foster carer's home. The Missing Persons Unit was informed/involved. The young person was located with family members in Peterborough 6 days later and was returned to his foster placement.

## **Allegations**

18. During this period there was 1 'anonymous' allegation made (February) against a Regulation 24 (Temporarily Approved) foster carer. The caller stated that the female carer was aggressive towards the children in her care, that she had witnessed the carer hit one of the children at Christmas and pulled her leg whilst trying to change her nappy. The LADO (Local Area Designated Officer) was consulted, and it was agreed this did not reach the threshold to be dealt with as an allegation. It was

therefore dealt with as a concern, a concerns meeting was held as well as a complex case discussion. The child's social worker and fostering social worker visited and a further concerns meeting is due to be held shortly to decide what action, if any, is needed.

## **Complaints**

19. During this period the service received 2 complaints (both in March). One complaint was from a Guardian complaining about the care a child received from a foster carer. This was fully investigated and dealt with in timescale. There were a number of complaints raised and the outcome was that only one part of the complaint was upheld, one was partially upheld and the others were not upheld.
20. The second complaint was from a birth father concerned about Facebook entries on the family/friends foster carers Facebook account. A Joint Evaluation Meeting (JEM) was held where concerns were raised that it may have been the birth father that fabricated the issue, had hacked into the carer's account and edited her Facebook account. The police and Facebook were contacted regarding the concerns and no further action was taken against the foster carer.

## **Compliments**

21. During this period 3 compliments were received about the fostering service.
  - One was from a foster carer who attended the Talktime meeting where foster carers have an opportunity to meet with senior managers and discuss fostering issues. She wrote to say how much she enjoyed the meeting and "how refreshing it was to discuss matters so dear to foster carers hearts and to feel heard"
  - The second compliment was from a childcare social worker regarding one of the foster carers she had worked with. She said "thanks so much for your hard work with E, it has not gone unnoticed and I hope I get to work with you in the future".
  - The third compliment was from the Fostering Panel regarding an assessment that had been completed by one of the fostering social workers. Panel felt that the assessment was extremely well written and presented well.

## **Staffing**

22. 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 (Full Time Equivalent) 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.

### **Council Priorities**

23. 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.

### **Corporate Implications**

#### **Risk Management:**

24. Regulatory Risks: The provision of sufficient and suitable foster placements is a key activity monitored by Ofsted during inspection, forming part of their judgement about services for Looked After Children.

Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.

Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.

Financial Risk: Looked after Children placements is a demand led activity. Independent Agency Placements are high cost, and variations in the proportion of independent versus in-house placements can have significant and immediate impact on forecast spend.

### **Legal Implications**

25. The Children Act 1989 identifies a statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide sufficient accommodation in their local area and to provide maintenance for children who are looked after.

The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the Local Authority's responsibility to ensure that foster carers are given clear information about the allowances, fees and expenses available to

them. The allowance must be sufficient to cover the cost of caring for a child placed with them and must be reviewed annually.

The Local Authority must provide support to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child.

### **Financial Implications**

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

### **Equalities Implications**

27. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children who are fostered the service needs to;

- Recruit and retain foster carers from a variety of different backgrounds and cultures
- Provide a range of training and support opportunities to foster carers which includes consideration of equality and diversity requirements
- Ensure appropriate cultural support and other expertise related to the protected characteristics is in place and reflects the different needs of children and young people
- Check the extent to which positive outcomes are achieved for different groups within the service
- Ensure that allegations related to discrimination and harassment are investigated and addressed
- Create and maintain a work place where all employees are treated with dignity and respect and promote equality of opportunity for foster carers, children and young people

### **Community Safety**

28. Not applicable.

### **Sustainability**

29. Not applicable.

### **Procurement**

30. Not applicable.

## **Conclusion and next Steps**

31. In conclusion it has been another busy quarter. Whilst the main focus of our work has been to recruit more foster carers and meet the recruitment target which has now been achieved, the fostering service has also strived to support existing foster carers to ensure they receive a good service, that when issues/difficulties arise that these are addressed swiftly and that foster carers feel part of a service that is developing and sensitive to their needs as well as child focussed. In preparation for the fostering services new recruitment target for 2015/16 to recruit a net gain of 15 foster carers work has also been completed this period to review the existing recruitment strategy and update it in view of our current needs.

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background Papers**

None