
FOSTERING AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 2014/2015

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@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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

Purpose of this report:

This report introduces the Fostering Agency Annual Report for Members to consider and note.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Annual Report.

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. The annual report for fostering will need to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny to note the contents and provide feedback.

Background

2. The Council has a duty to provide a range of types of placements for looked after children which meet their needs. In most cases a child needs should be met by living in a family setting, either with someone known to them (known as a friends and family or connected person foster placement) or with foster carers.
3. The Council recruits its own foster carers, known as 'in-house' foster carers and also has the legal responsibility for assessing and approving friends and family foster carers. In order to meet the demand for placements for children in care, foster placements are also bought from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Central Bedfordshire Council, in conjunction with Luton Borough Council and Bedford Borough Council has

a Framework Agreement with 18 such agencies to offer suitable and sufficient IFA placements within a tight cost and quality framework.

Council Priorities

4. Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable
5. The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.
6. Providing a sufficient number and range of foster placements is a key statutory responsibility to Looked After Children

Corporate Implications

Risk Management:

7. 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.
8. Child Protection Risks: Failure to recruit or retain sufficient foster carers would be a child protection risk.
9. Reputational Risk: Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market activity and has a high media profile.
10. 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

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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

14. Impact per report dated 24 March 2014
15. Overheads for the Fostering Service are fixed and will not be increased as a result of the proposed increase in number of in-house placements.
16. The increased cost of implementing the Fee scheme with current number of in-house placements is £298,000. This is cost incurred before any growth in foster placements. The increased cost of a further 10 placements in 2014-15 is an additional £144,000. Adding these together, the proposed increase fits within the agreed cost for 2014-15 of £499,000.
17. For the year 2015-16, the increase of a further 15 in-house placements is costed at £218,000.

Outcome to 31 June 2015

18. The New Foster Scheme has achieved all the targets set for the first year.

Impact of proposed variation

19. The proposed variation clarifies the rate of allowance to be paid to Foster Carers in their respective tier bands and reflects that payments reflect appropriate skills. It will have no direct financial impact.

Equalities Implications

20. Fostering allowances must meet the cost of caring for a child. The allowance scheme must ensure that any additional costs incurred in caring for a disabled child or a child with other specific needs is met.

Conclusion and next Steps

21. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note progress on the development and agree the implementation of the revisions proposed to the fostering fees scheme.

Appendices

- Appendix A - Fostering Agency Annual Report 2014/15
- Appendix B - Fostering Panel Overview Report – Panel Chair April 2014 to March 2015
- Appendix C - Panel Activity

Background Papers

None