

QUARTER ONE REPORT ON THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Report of Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
(gerard.jones@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

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

Purpose of this report

1. Fostering Services Regulations 2000 require the Fostering Agency to monitor and control the activities of the Fostering Service and ensure quality performance. Quarter reports are presented to elected members in order to outline the activities in the Fostering Service so that members can monitor and feedback on the quality and performance of the service.

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

- Comment on the contents of this report.

Issues

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.
2. This is the first quarter report for the financial year 2015/2016.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

3. During April, May and June, a variety of revised recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
4. As a result of reviewing the Fostering Recruitment Strategy there has been a reduction in the level of outreach work undertaken as these activities are resource intensive and although they are good at promoting fostering in general they have not generated the level of referrals expected. Outreach undertaken has included attendance at Flitwick

recruitment fayre, Flitwick leisure centre, Leighton Buzzard library and a 'Get qualified' jobs fair. Two fostering information events were also held where members of the public could attend to find out more about fostering.

5. In relation to advertising, family and friends leaflets and a fostering poster aimed at black and minority ethnic groups were redesigned. The posters and leaflets were delivered to various mosques/centres/churches. A series of posters spelling 'FOSTERING' were designed, printed and installed in the poster site outside Watling House in Dunstable overlooking the main road through Dunstable. The School Crossing sponsorship went live. School crossing patrol officers in various schools around Central Bedfordshire now have the fostering logo and contact details on their jackets.
6. Online 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.
7. During this period we received a total of 29 enquiries, 7 in April, 10 in May and 12 in June. There were 14 Initial Visits; 4 in April, 6 in May and 4 in June. 11 Application forms were received; 4 in April, 4 in May and 3 in June. In comparison to the same period last year there were a total of 86 enquiries, 20 in April, 45 in May and 21 in June. There were 35 initial visits for the same period last year, 14 in April, 16 in May and 5 in June. There were 5 application forms received, 2 in April and 3 in May.

Assessments

8. As of the 30 June 2015 there were 19 assessments in progress, 11 for career carers, 2 Regulation 24 (emergency family and friends), 3 full family and friends/connected persons and 3 SGO (Special Guardianship Order) assessments.
9. During this quarter 4 families were approved to foster, all of whom were family and friends carers who between them were approved to care for a total of 4 children.
10. As of the 30 of June 2015 the Fostering Service had a total of 103 fostering households (compared to 105 at the end of March 2015). 77 of these carers were career carers (which is the same as the end of March 2015) and 26 Family and Friends/Regulation 24 (compared to 28 at the end of March 2015). This was due to 2 Regulation 24 ending and becoming SGO's (Special Guardianship Orders). As of the 30 June 2014 the Fostering Service had a total of 92 fostering households of which 67 were career carers. S.G.O.'s are continuing to rise as there arrangements are in place until the child reaches 18 and many S.G.O.'s are being made for very young children. Each year there is on average an additional 30 S.G.O.'s made so the number of SGO Carers is growing and will continue to do so.

11. As at 30 June 2015 there were 124 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 114 at the end of March 2015). The majority of the SGO's granted were to Family and Friends/foster carers so the children they cared for were no longer classed as looked after. S.G.O.'s are continuing to rise as there arrangements are in place until the child reaches 18 and many S.G.O.'s are being made for very young children. Each year there is on average an additional 30 S.G.O.'s made so the number of SGO Carers is growing and will continue to do so.

Referrals/Placement

12. During April, May and June 31 new fostering placements were made; 7 in April, 9 were in May and 15 were in June. This is a decrease of 4 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 31 new placements, 14 were placed in house. 9 out of the 17 young people placed in IFA placements were asylum seekers who needed carers who could better meet their cultural/language needs, this breakdown included: 1 Kurdish; 1 Syrian; 1 Asian; 1 Ethiopian; 2 Vietnamese; 3 Eritrean. 1 child was placed with their mother in a parent and baby unit, 2 young people had challenging behaviour and there were no in house carers available to meet their needs, 1 was placed at St. Christopher's and 1 with a Youth Offending Institution. The remaining 3 young people placed externally went into semi independent living arrangements.

Training

13. In April the range of training the Fostering Service could access was extended with LSCB, Social Care and the Early Years team in order to enable foster carers to be able to access a wider selection of training and avoid duplication of courses. There is an on line booking system to access so training was limited in this quarter in order to support foster carers in learning how to use the system. During this quarter the Fostering Service therefore facilitated 3 training courses, 2 in first aid and 1 about children going missing; the risk of sexual exploitation. By June carers were beginning to get used to the on-line booking system and were accessing various courses provided by the LSCB and Early Years providers as well as accessing more choice in on line training.
14. As of the 30 June there were 73 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's); 22 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 Recruitment and Training Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve these standards.

Ofsted Notifications

15. 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 no notifications.

Allegations

16. During this period there were 3 allegations made (1 in April and 2 in May). All 3 referrals were referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) but none reached the threshold to be investigated. The first allegation was from a child who stated that their prospective Regulation 24 placement foster carer pushed them. The assessing social worker dealt with this issue with the foster carer. The second allegation was in relation to behaviour management strategies used by the foster carer and was dealt with by the Fostering Service as a practice issue. The third allegation was from a neighbour of a foster carer who stated that the child in placement was refused food and was spoken to inappropriately. This was dealt with as a concern and the fostering social worker addressed the concerns with the foster carer.

Complaints

17. There were no complaints made against the Fostering Service during this period.

Compliments

18. During this period 7 compliments were received about the fostering service (2 in April, 3 in May and 2 in June).
19. The first compliment in April was from a birth mother thanking the fostering social work assistant for her support in court during the final hearing. The second was from the fostering panel adviser who stated that an assessment one of the assessing social workers had completed was a very good, thorough and in depth report. The first compliment in May was from the fostering panel that provided positive feedback to a fostering social worker for their collaborative work and for their good report writing. The other two were from prospective foster carers who gave positive feedback on the skills to fostering preparation training in relation to the facilitators of the course who were fostering social workers. The first compliment in June was from a foster carer regarding the marketing, recruitment and training officer who was instrumental in setting up the training website. The second compliment was from a senior social worker in the court and permanency team regarding the assessing social worker. She felt they had worked collaboratively which helped to ensure a positive outcome.

Annual Budget

20. For the financial year 2015/2016 Adoption and Fostering Service within Children's Services has a combined annual budget of £3,670,855 excluding placement costs.

Reporting to Members - Legal Requirements

21. 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

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

Staffing

23. The Fostering Service 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 full time equivalent Social Workers, 1.5 full time equivalent Social Work Assistants, 1 full time Marketing Recruitment Officer, 1 full time Training Co-ordinator, a part time panel adviser and 2 panel secretaries supporting the Service in relation to recruitment, training, panel and placements, 2 full time Administrators also support the two Fostering Teams.

Equality/Human Rights

24. Fostering Services provided to Looked After Children affects all sectors of communities.

Council Priorities

25. Central Bedfordshire Council's medium term plan priority Promote Health and Wellbeing.
Children and Young People's Plan June 2013 – March 2015.
Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Corporate Implications

26. Legal, Financial, and Equalities implications were requested and are included in the report. Financial was not completed prior to the report being sent for consultation.

Legal Implications

27. This is quarterly report to provide numerical information, as a result there are no legal implications arising out of this report.

Financial Implications

28. This is a quarterly report to provide numerical information, as a result there are no financial implications arising out of this report.

Equalities Implications

29. 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.

Conclusion and next Steps

30. Whilst the Fostering Service met the recruitment target set of 10 new career foster families last year a more challenging one has been set for this financial year. The Service's main focus in this quarter, therefore, has been to continue to build on the number of fostering households and placements we have. We have made a promising start as there are currently 11 career carer assessments in progress and our recruitment target for the year is to recruit 15.
31. This quarter has seen a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers needing to be accommodated. Many of these young people are being placed in semi-independent living but there are still a number in need of foster placements. As this number rises the service will be reviewing its recruitment strategy to try to identify creative ways of recruiting carers who can specifically meet the differing needs these young people have.
32. During this quarter there have been no notifications or complaints and although 3 allegations were made against the service none met the threshold to be investigated but were appropriately dealt with. This low level of activity gives an indication that foster carers have been provided with the relevant supervision, support and training to help ensure that children's needs are appropriately met. This is also supported by the

high number of compliments the service has received in this quarter which have come from a wide range of sources.

33. In conclusion this has been a promising start for the Fostering Service and we will continue to build on what has already been achieved in order to meet our recruitment targets and provide a quality service.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None