

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

9 November 2015

**AGENCY REPORT QUARTER 2 – FOSTERING 1 JULY – 30
SEPTEMBER 2015**

Report of Sue Harrison, Director of Children’s Services

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1. Fostering Services Regulations 2000 require the Fostering Agency to monitor and control the activities of the Fostering Service and ensure quality performance. Quarterly 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 Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the Agency Report Quarter 2 – Fostering and agree Appendix A: Statement of Purpose 2015.

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 3 monthly intervals. This will be achieved by presentation of quarterly reports.
2. This is the second quarterly report (1 July – 30 September) for the financial year 2015/2016.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

3. During July, August and September, a variety of recruitment activities/events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.

4. As a result of reviewing the Fostering Recruitment Strategy we have cut back on 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. In July and September we held drop in sessions and 2 information evenings for people interested in learning more about fostering. No outreach work took place in August as this is generally a quiet month for recruitment activity/responses.

5. In relation to advertising, an advert was placed in Kids Talk magazine focusing on recruiting carers who could take sibling groups. Adverts and posters were put up in G.P. surgeries across the Central Bedfordshire area. A window display was designed for a Dunstable showcase window and fostering adverts on till receipts at Argos started. A newspaper advert was placed in Beds on Sunday trying to recruit more carers. Posters regarding sibling groups and older children were sent to G.P.'s and dental surgeries across the CBC area. An advert provided for digital monitors was also set up for G.P and dental surgeries. An advert was placed in the Times and Citizen advertising fostering in general as well as promoting a forthcoming information evening. An article was published in Luton News regarding the 'Celebration of Fostering' event that took place focusing on a foster carer who received an award. In her regular CBC blog the Director of Children's Services also mentioned the 'Celebration of Fostering' event.

6. Online posts on Facebook have been promoted throughout this quarter either advertising forthcoming Information Evenings/Events, promoting the need to recruit foster care from the general public or posting a questions and answer session. A rotating advert about Fostering was introduced to CBC's website homepage. A Net Native digital campaign using Facebook was also promoted. (Two of the foster carers who also received awards at the 'Celebration of Fostering' event also had their photos and interviews placed on the Beds on Sunday's webpage and Facebook page).

7. As a result of the recruitment drive during this period we received a total of 26 enquiries (although 30 less than in the last quarter, enquiries generally fall during this period due to it being the holiday season). There were 13 in July, 3 in August and 10 in September. There were 18 Initial Visits during this period, 12 in July, 4 in August and 2 in September. There were 8 application forms received during this period. 1 for July, 3 for August and 4 for September (this is the same number as the previous quarter).

Assessments

8. As of the 30 September 2015 there were 19 assessments in progress, 10 for career carers, 2 Regulation 24 (temporary family and friends carers), 3 full family and friends/connected persons carers and 4 Special Guardianship Order assessments.
9. During this quarter 6 fostering households were approved, 2 of these were as Family and Friend Carers, the other 4 were approved as career carers and their approvals were as follows –
 - 1 male child 5-18 (5-16 at time of placement) for short term or long term care
 - 2 children age 0-18 (0-8 at start of placement) either gender, short term long term or respite
 - 2 children age 0-18, either gender, short term, long term, emergency and respite
 - 1 child age 0-5 either gender, short term and respite
 - 1 child, (2 if siblings and can share the same room) age 5-12, either gender, short term long term and respite.
10. As of the 30 September 2015 the Fostering Agency 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 at the end of March 2015) and 26 Family and Friends/Regulation 24 (compared to 28 at the end of March 2015).
11. As at 30 September 2015 there were 129 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.

Referrals/Placement

12. During July, August and September 39 new fostering placements were made; 5 in July, 17 were in August and 17 were in September. This is an increase of 8 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 39 new placements, 20 were placed in house. 12 out of the 19 young people placed in IFA placements were asylum seeking children. 1 child was placed with their mother in a parent and baby placement, 1 young person had challenging behaviour and there were no in house carers available to meet his needs. 3 young people were placed in residential care, 1 young person was placed into secure accommodation, the remaining 1 young person was placed in a semi independent living arrangements.

Training

13. July and August are not good months to arrange training due to this being the holiday period; however during this quarter 9 internal training courses still took place. Courses included; an introduction to theraplay, safer caring, 2 x childcare emergency first aid, Fostering Changes (promoting placement stability), contact and working with birth parents, Tax talk for foster carers, supporting the health needs of Looked After Children and the preparation to foster training. Carers also accessed the shared training programs provided by Early Years and LSCB, these included; understanding sexual abuse and the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people.
14. As of the 30 September there were 70 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's); 27 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 was 1 allegation made in July regarding a fostering household but it was in relation to their adopted child, this was discussed with the Local Authority Designated Officer (L.A.D.O.) and referred to access and referral team but no further action was taken. It later transpired to be a malicious allegation.

Complaints

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

Compliments

18. During this period 3 written compliments were received about the fostering service (2 in July and 1 in September). 2 of these compliments were from foster carers feeding back on how much they had enjoyed a social evening the fostering team put on, the other compliment was in

relation to an assessing social worker who was complimented by the Fostering Panel on the quality of the assessment she presented. Several compliments were also received from foster carers, a Councillor and other staff in relation to the Celebration of Fostering event, many people stated that it was an enjoyable and well organised event.

Annual Budget

19. For the financial year 2015/2016 Adoption and Fostering Service within Children's Services has a combined annual budget of £3,670, 855. It is a joint budget as there are still areas between the teams that are linked i.e. panels; training and recruitment costs.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

20. 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

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

Staffing

22. The Fostering Service is part 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 Fostering 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 with the Service, 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

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

Council Priorities

24. 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 statutory service for Looked After Children.

Corporate Implications

25. Legal, Financial and Equalities implications are not required for this report.

Legal Implications

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

Financial Implications

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

Equalities Implications

28. 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

29. In this quarter the Service has continued to focus on meeting its recruitment target which is to recruit 15 career carers in this financial year. 5 career carers have already been approved and there are a further 10 assessments in progress. If all assessments progress to panel and are recommended for approval then by the end of March 2015 we will have met the target. We will then continue to recruit as many additional carers as we can as each placement provides the opportunity for a local child in care to enjoy a placement close to home at a reduced cost to the Council compared to purchased foster care from the private and independent sector.

30. The percentage of children placed in house continues to rise. At the end of September 2015 56% of our children were placed in house compared to I.F.A.'s, this compares to 54% at the end of March 2015 and 46% at the end of March 2014. With the increase in number of in house placements the Service is able to provide the prediction is that this figure will increase year on year until the Service reaches a level of being able to provide 70 to 80% of fostering placements in house.
31. During this quarter there have been no notifications or complaints and only 1 allegation. This was to do with a foster carer care of an adopted child and was found to be malicious. 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.
32. In conclusion this has been a busy and productive quarter for the Fostering Service, we are on course to meet our recruitment targets and are continuing to provide a quality service and meet Ofsted requirements.

Appendices

Appendix A – Fostering Service - Statement of Purpose – Fostering 1 April 2015

Background Papers

None