

## Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 14 March 2016

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### **Fostering Agency Report Quarter 3 - 1 October -31 December 2015**

Report of Cllr Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing  
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#### **Purpose of this report**

1. Fostering Services Regulations 2000 requires 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.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Executive or Committee is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 Report

#### **Issues**

2. 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 regularly on the activities of the Service.
3. This is the third quarter report for the financial year 2015/2016.

#### **Recruitment of Foster Carers**

4. During October, November and December 2015, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
5. In terms of outreach work 7 activities took place (one in October, four in November and two in December). These included presentations to staff

at Swanstaff in Houghton Regis and Childminders in Pottton. Information evenings and “drop in” sessions to find out more about fostering were held in Flitwick and Bedford. The Service also had information stands at the Family Court Open Day and at Priory Methodist Church.

6. In relation to advertising, an advert was placed in Community Care jobs. The Service was a page sponsor for East of England online which included an editorial in their digital magazine. A window display advertising fostering in one of the Dunstable showcase shops was placed in October and November. Leaflets and promotional items were distributed to all Central Bedfordshire Councillors. Leaflets about fostering were distributed at an Access and Inclusion Network meeting. A leaflet and poster drop about caring for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People was sent to the volunteers and trustees of Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support (BRASS).
7. Press coverage took place in the form of editorials in the Times and Citizen, Biggleswade and the Chronicle and Leighton Buzzard Observer in relation to the Celebration of Fostering event that took place in September. An editorial was also placed in the Early Years newsletter regarding fostering in general and there was an article in the Staff Central magazine.
8. Online posts have continued to be promoted during this quarter. The Service had a rotating advert about fostering on Central Bedfordshire Council’s website homepage. A Net Native digital campaign using Facebook was promoted. An email advertising fostering and an up and coming information evening were placed on Central Bedfordshire Council’s email alert. As part of 24 hour ‘tweetathon’ via twitter ‘#(hashtag)ourday’ the Service included Twitter messages. The Fostering Service sponsored two pages in the East of England On line magazine. Facebook posts were also placed on the fostering page and included myth busting questions and answers and seasons greetings.
9. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of 16 enquiries: 10 in October, 5 in November and 1 in December (10 less than the previous quarter). There were 18 Initial Visits during this period: 8 in October, 5 in November and 5 in December (this is the same number as the previous quarter). There were 11 application forms received during this period: 4 for October, 4 for November and 3 for December (3 more than in the previous quarter). The best forms of recruitment in this period were via the net native campaign, the website, followed by word of mouth from other foster carers or staff.

## Assessments

10. During this period 9 new assessments were started: 2 career carer, 4 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 1 Family and Friends and 2 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments. As of the 31 December 2015 there were a total of 19 assessments in progress: 12 for career carers, 1 full family and friends/connected persons and 6 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments.
11. During this quarter 2 fostering households were approved, both of which were as family and friends' foster carers.
12. As of the 31 December 2015 the Fostering Agency had a total of 97 fostering households, 74 of these carers were career carers.
13. In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers and children placed, there is a good match of ethnicity with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care.

<b>Ethnicity</b>		
<b><i>Ethnicity</i></b>	<b><i>Foster Carers</i></b>	<b><i>Looked After Children</i></b>
White	90%	82%
Dual Heritage	1%	10%
Black or Black British	7%	6%
Asian	2%	2%
	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

14. As of the 31 December 2015 there were a total of 119 children placed with in house foster carers (57%), compared to 90 (43%) with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). Since the disaggregation of the fostering service with Bedford Borough Council at the end of December 2013, the number of children placed with in house foster carers continues to increase year on year and therefore our reliance on more expensive IFA placements decreases.
15. As at the 31 December 2015 there were 131 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 129 at the end of the last quarter in September 2015). Although Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers are generally expected to access universal services, they are entitled to seek support from the Local Authority as and when required. The Fostering Service continues to work with a small cohort of families who contact the service sporadically for support and advice. On average the service works with about 5 families a month and will undertake visits, or provide telephone support in order to meet the needs of individual carers. The main area Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers seek support with is in relation to contact, children's behaviour or support in financing respite and holiday activities etc.

## **Referrals/Placements**

16. During October, November and December 2015 twenty three new fostering placements were made: 7 in October, 2 in November and 14 in December. This is a decrease of 16 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 23 new placements, 12 were placed in house, 7 out of the 11 young people placed in Independent Foster Agencies (IFA's) were asylum seeking young people 5 of whom were placed in semi-independent living accommodation. The other 4 placed were for young people with challenging behaviour and there were no in house resources available to meet their needs.

## **Training**

17. During this quarter 14 in house fostering training courses took place. This included intensive weekly Fostering Changes training (behavioural management strategies to support placement stability), supporting education achievement, understanding attachment and trauma, understanding bad behaviour, skills to foster and first aid. Carers also accessed the shared training programmed provided by Early Years and Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), these included safeguarding awareness, introduction to play in a home setting, Makaton, Promoting children's emotional wellbeing, Healthy lifestyle choices for children, the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and the busy world of a 2 year old. E-learning was also accessed on the following topics:- foetal exposure to alcohol, parental mental health issues, communicating with children and young people, impulsive behaviour, child development, narrative work and contact in foster care.

18. As of the 31 December there were 68 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (T.S.D.'s); 21 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 3 households were overdue in completing their TSD Standards and were outside the required timescale. Supervising social workers and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer were providing additional support to help these carers achieve the standards.

## **Ofsted Notifications**

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**

During this period there were no allegations made regarding foster carers. A concern was raised in relation to a family and friends foster carer's behaviour, it did not, however, meet the criteria to be investigated as an allegation and

was addressed with a plan of action agreed, which included reviewing the foster carers approval.

## **Complaints**

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

## **Compliments**

During this period there were 11 compliments received covering a range of work undertaken. In October a social worker fed back on the work the social work assistant was doing with a Looked After Child (LAC) stating this was "having a hugely positive impact". In court the solicitor for a Children's Guardian praised the quality of the assessment presented by one of the assessing social workers. An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) also wrote in her feedback for a foster carer review – "excellent foster carer's, have played a significant role providing quality care which has contributed to the progress both children have made".

During November a foster carer received a complimentary letter from a birth mother thanking her for all her work. Four thank you letters were also received from foster carers thanking the team for the book vouchers given to their children as part of sons and daughters week. In December a Thank You was received from a friends and family carer to the assessing/supervising social worker stating "many grateful thanks for the support and help you have given ". One foster carer thanked a member of staff "for being brilliant with an over tired child" at the 'Kids Who Care' pantomime. Another foster carer also thanked the fostering team for taking her son to the pantomime, stating "he was so excited when he told us about it".

## **Annual Budget**

For the Financial year 2015/2016 Adoption and Fostering Service within Children's Services has a combined annual budget of £3,673,263.

## **Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements**

Regulations associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirement to report to Members on the management and outcomes of Services provided, in order that they can satisfy themselves that the Services provided are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

## **Risk Management**

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

## **Staffing**

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. At the end of December 2015 there were 14.3 full time social workers within the Service, 1 full time social work assistant, 1 full time Marketing, Recruitment and Training Officer, 1 part time Panel Adviser, 2 full time panel secretaries and 2 full time business support officers. As of the 31 December 2015 one team managers post remains vacant, with the work being covered by the other manager and practice manager. Interviews took place for 3 social worker vacancies in December with recommendations being made to fill all 3 posts. Interviews were also held for the panel adviser post and a recommendation made in relation to this post.

## **Council Priorities**

The Children and Young People's Plan 2015-2017; Priority 2 Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

## **Legal Implications**

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

## **Financial and Risk Implications**

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

## **Equalities Implications**

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. Analysis indicates that:

- there is a good match of ethnicity with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care
- carers are recruited from diverse backgrounds
- with the recruitment of additional career carers this has enabled more choice in placement availability, therefore better matchings are taking place and this contributes to placement stability

- Equality / cultural awareness training is available for all foster carers to access

## **Conclusion and next Steps**

21. 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. Whilst no career carers have been approved during this quarter, the number of assessments currently in progress and timescales set are set to enable the service to meet its recruitment target by 31 March 2016.
22. As of the 31 December 2015 57% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 43% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The % of children placed in house is increasing on a month by month and year by year basis. This has not only enabled the Local Authority to make significant savings in relation to our use of more expensive Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements but it has also meant that we have more choice in terms of available placements and therefore better matching can take place. Children are being placed with local foster carers and placement stability has improved.
23. The aspiration is to have 70% of children placed with in house foster carers and 30% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) in future years. This is ambitious; however, based on progress made, thus far, this aspiration is achievable and reflects a strong position for Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) in only using Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) for specialist out of area placements.
24. During this quarter the Fostering Service piloted 'Fostering Changes' which is an intensive training programme for foster carers that provides them with the tools and strategies to manage difficult and challenging behaviour and enhance attachments with children. The feedback from this course has been positive and will now be taken forward as a regular training course for foster carers and staff in the fostering service will also be training in this area. This training has and will continue to make an invaluable contribution to the support and retention of foster carers and will contribute to placement stability.
25. During this quarter there have been no notifications, allegations or complaints. The lack of activity in these areas is a further indication of placement stability and suggests that foster carers are being provided with the relevant supervision, support and training to help ensure that children's needs are being appropriately met.
26. In conclusion this has been another busy and productive quarter for the Fostering Service. We are on course to meet our recruitment targets and are continuing to support foster carers and children to enhance placement stability.

**Appendices**

None

**Background Papers**

None