

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

4 July 2016

Agency Report Quarter 4 - Fostering 1 January-31 March 2016

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, Corporate Parenting Service, Fostering
(annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk),

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.

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 4 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 fourth quarter report for the financial year 2015/2016.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

4. During January, February and March 2016, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
5. In terms of outreach work 5 activities took place (one in January, 3 in February and 1 in March). These included a presentation to Job Centre

Plus in Leighton Buzzard, attendance at 2 information stands at events at Queens Park Academy and All Saints Church in Bedford. An information event was held at Millbrook village hall and a drop in session in Dunstable; both events are where members of the public are invited to attend if they want to find out more about fostering.

6. In relation to advertising, throughout this quarter we had a page sponsor with East of England Online with an editorial in their digital magazine. A half page advert was placed in Bedfordshire on Sunday advertising fostering in general and 2 forthcoming information events. Leaflets and information booklets were shared with teachers at a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) training session. Posters and information booklets were distributed to the police, fire service, health representatives, the Rufus Centre and parish councils. A 7 foot poster promoting fostering was placed in Dunstable Shopping Centre; the image used was relevant to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). An A5 fostering advert was placed in 'Info Central; your guide to council services, spending and key contacts for 2016/2017'. This was sent to all homes in Central Bedfordshire with Council Tax bills.
7. Press coverage took place in the form of an editorial which included interviews with 2 CBC foster carers in Bedfordshire on Sunday. An article (which also advertised the fostering drop in) was placed in Staff Central. A press release and article regarding LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) adoption and fostering week was placed in the Times and Citizen.
8. Online posts have continued to be promoted during this quarter. Editorials about fostering, The LGBT fostering and adoption week and forthcoming drop ins were placed on the Fostering Facebook and Central Bedfordshire Facebook and Twitter pages. An article titled 'Central Bedfordshire Council seeking homes for children during LGBT Adoption and Fostering week' was placed on Bedfordshire on Sunday's website. Editorials were also placed on Bedfordshire News and Bedfordshire News website. Email messages/alerts were also sent from the CBC email alerts system to residents in Central Bedfordshire area regarding fostering and a forthcoming fostering drop in session that was due to be held.
9. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period the Fostering Service received a total of 24 enquiries: 8 in January, 9 in February and 7 in March (this is 8 more than in the last quarter). There were 15 Initial Visits during this period: 4 in January, 4 in February and 7 in March (this is 3 less than in the previous quarter). There were 5 application forms received during this period: 2 in January, 0 in February and 3 in March (this was 6 less than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment by far during this period was via the website.

Assessments

10. During this period 15 new assessments were started: 6 career carer, 3 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 1 Family and Friends and 5 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments. As of the 31st March 2016, there were a total of 11 assessments in progress: 5 for career carers, 1 Regulation 24, 2 Family and Friends and 3 SGO assessments.
11. During this quarter 10 fostering households were approved, 9 as career carers and 1 as a family and friends carer.
12. As of the 31st March 2016 the Fostering Agency had a total of 104 fostering households, 82 of these 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.

Ethnicity		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Foster Carers</i>	<i>Looked After Children</i>
White	173 (91%)	217 (76.1%)
Dual Heritage	2 (1%)	26 (9.1%)
Black or Black British	9 (5%)	8 (5.3%)
Asian	5 (3%)	15 (2.8%)
Other	-	19 (6.7%)
	189 (100%)	285 100%

14. As of the 31st March 2016 there were a total of 117 children placed with in house foster carers (59%), compared to 82 (41%) with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The number of children placed with in house carers is increasing year on year. At the end of March 2014 the percentage of children placed in house was 46% , by the end of March 2015 this had increased to 54%, by the end of March 2016 it was 59% and as of the 4th April it is now 62%. Our aspiration is to increase this further to 70% as there will always be children that need to be placed out of the area or in IFA/residential placements. This will not only improve services to children in care who will have local placements to better meet their needs and it will also decrease our reliance on more expensive IFA placements.
15. As of the 31st March 2016 there were 130 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 131 at the end of the last quarter). Although Special Guardian 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 or holiday activities.

Referrals/Placements

16. During January, February and March 2016 there were 11 new fostering placements made: 0 in January, 2 in February and 9 in March. This is a decrease of 12 new placements compared to the last quarter. Out of the 11 new placements made, 6 were placed in house (5 under 2's and a 12 year old), 2 were placed in IFA's (1 UASC and a 12 year old), 1 was placed in semi-independent living, 1 was placed in a parent and child placement and 1 was placed in a residential home.

Training

17. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 13 specialist in house training courses which included: childcare emergency first aid, strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour, specifically those who go missing, challenging behaviour, de-escalation and restraint, sexual exploitation, safer caring, allegations, contact and working with birth families, supporting educational achievement, supporting the health of LAC and a Margo Sunderland conference on teenagers locked in rage and hate. The Service also enabled foster carers to access e-learning training on the following subjects: Adolescence, brain development and positive parenting, an introduction to safeguarding, equality and diversity and understanding pathways to extremism and prevent programme, child protection, safer caring, attachment and brain development, sexualised behaviour, safe sleeping for babies and early child development. Carers also accessed the shared training programme provided by Early Years and Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), these included; Autism Spectrum conditions, understanding sexual trauma, crisis intervention, meeting the needs of 2 year olds, developing children's cognitive skills, teenage relationship violence, breaking away from print (storytelling), parental substance misuse, enabling play and a Makaton workshop.
18. As of the 31st March 2016 there were 68 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's) and 23 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 7 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

19. 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

20. During this period there were no allegations made regarding foster carers.

Complaints

21. During this period there were no complaints made against the Fostering Service. 1 prospective foster carer did write to her MP because she was unhappy that the Fostering Service had decided not to follow through her interest in fostering a specific child. One of the fostering managers and social work assistant undertook a joint visit to explain the decision.

Compliments

22. During this period there were 16 compliments received covering a range of work undertaken. An IRO gave very positive feedback about 2 foster carers regarding the care they were providing to 2 LAC. A compliment was also forwarded by an IRO following an adoption review. He stated that the adopters spoke very positively of the foster carers regarding introductions. They stated that 'the foster family were lovely and went beyond what would have been expected during introductions. They provided a "full on service" by doing everything so they (the adopters) could concentrate entirely on the girls'. The adopters were very grateful for this and seemed overwhelmed by how much the foster carers did to facilitate the introductions. A childcare social worker gave very positive feedback regarding 1 set of foster carers who had moved from being IFA carers to CBC ones and were caring for a sibling group of 2. The social worker stated that 'they are consistently meeting the children's needs and are providing the care that they need to be able to develop and achieve their potential'. A thank you card was also received from a family and friends carer thanking the assessing/supporting social worker for 'all her help and support'. The remaining compliments were made by Fostering Panel either in relation to the quality of the written work submitted or presentation of social workers at panel. The panel secretaries were also complimented as the departing panel adviser who had worked for various Local Authorities stated that they were 'the best she had ever come across'.

Annual Budget

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

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

24. Regulations, associated Statutory Guidance and National Minimum Standards outline the requirements 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

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

Staffing

26. 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 2 fostering teams. During this period there have been a number of staff changes with some experienced senior assessing and supervising social workers moving on. This has enabled the service to creatively develop staffing roles i.e. changing some roles from seniors to social workers and expanding the number of hours worked so as to accommodate the number of new carers coming through as well as making savings in relation to the overall staffing budget. All vacant posts have now been recruited to with some staff already in post and others to follow shortly.

Council Priorities

27. 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

28. 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.
29. 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.

30. 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.
31. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the performance of the Fostering Agency. As the report is provided in accordance with timescales and does not highlight any issues, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

32. The Fostering and Adoption provisional outturn for the financial year 2015/16 is a £414k overspend (a rise from the overspend reported in quarter three of £347k). This is mainly due to inter agency costs and the rise in child arrangement/special guardianship orders and adoption allowances.

Equalities Implications

33. 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
34. This report highlights that a range of methods are being used to attract prospective carers from diverse backgrounds. A good match is being achieved in terms of ethnicity, with foster carers broadly reflecting the ethnicity of our children in care. Equality training is being provided to all foster carers.

Conclusion and next Steps

35. During this quarter the service continued to focus on progressing the number of assessments taking place through to panel for approval. During this period 9 new 'career' carers were approved which enabled the service to meet its recruitment target of 15 new carers in the financial year 2015/16. Although the recruitment target for 2016/17 is only to recruit 10 new foster carers this will be a challenging target as the focus will be on recruiting those carers who are harder to recruit to i.e. carers who can take older children, sibling groups and children with challenging behaviour.

36. As of 31st March 2016 59% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 41% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The % of children placed in house has increased 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 IFA placements but it has also meant that we have more choice in terms of available placements and therefore better matching has taken place.
37. For the second quarter running there has been no need to report any issues/concerns to Ofsted and there have been no allegations or complaints. During this quarter a high number of compliments were received. This is not only because the service is better at now reporting good areas of work but it is also an indication that foster carers are well trained/supported and when issues arise they receive a quick response from the Corporate Parenting Service who work extremely well together to support foster carers.
38. In conclusion this has been a positive end to the financial year with targets met and an increase in the number of in house placements. This has enabled children to be placed in local resources that better meet their needs, where there is more choice in relation to placements and placement stability has been enhanced because foster carers are receiving the appropriate training and support to help them provide a high standard of care to the children placed with them.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None