

Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday, 5 September 2016

Fostering Agency Report - Quarter 1 (1 April - 30 June 2016)

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

1. Fostering Services Regulations 2011 requires the Fostering Agency to monitor the activities of the Fostering Service and ensure quality performance. Quarterly reports are presented to elected Members to keep them informed and updated on the activities in the Fostering Service so that Members can monitor and comment on the quality and performance of the Service.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive or Committee is asked to:

1. To comment on and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 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 quarterly on the activities of the Service.
3. This is the first quarter report for the financial year 2016/2017.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

4. During April, May and June 2016, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services Recruitment Action Plan.
5. In terms of outreach work 6 activities took place (2 in each month). These included information stands at Chicksands Family Fun Day and

with the 'Just Ask' bus in Sandy, Flitwick, Shefford and Stotfold. We also held an information drop in event at Stephenson Court, Bedford where members of the public were invited to attend to find out more about fostering.

6. Throughout this quarter some ongoing advertising continued, these included;
 - A page sponsor with East of England Online.
 - A 7 foot poster promoting fostering in Dunstable shopping centre
 - An A5 fostering advert displayed in Info Central; your guide to Council Services, spending and key contacts for 2016/17 (this was sent out to all homes in Central Bedfordshire with Council Tax bills).
 - Fostering continued to advertise on a roundabout in Flitwick outside Tesco store and fostering adverts were still being used on the back of the jackets of crossing patrol staff at various schools across Central Bedfordshire.
 - A digital fostering advert was placed in waiting rooms in Dr's surgeries throughout the CBC area.
 - Posters were distributed to dental surgeries across the County.
 - A fostering advert was projected in the main reception area at Priory House, Chicksands.
 - Targeted leaflet drops took place in areas where our children are placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (I.F.A.'s), leaflets were also distributed promoting a forthcoming information evening.
 - An article highlighting our current recruitment needs was placed in Flitwick's paper magazine which is sent to all homes in Flitwick including local shops and community building.

7. The following press coverage took place during this quarter;
 - An interview with a foster carer in an article promoting sibling contact went in the Fostering Network's national magazine.
 - A fostering article about fostering fortnight was sent out to all staff in Staff Central.
 - Press releases regarding Foster Care fortnight were also sent to local media and parish councils.
 - Press releases were sent to local media promoting information events around the County.

8. On line posts for this quarter included;
 - Sponsorship with East of England Online with an editorial in their digital magazine.
 - An A5 events flyer was also shared with the community safety partnership service to share with contacts in town and parish councils, community groups, health, police and fire services promoting forthcoming information evenings.
 - Email bulletins or email articles were placed in various newsletters including Early Years, Bedford Hospital Staff,

Governors Essential and Connect (social care, health, housing and portfolio holders).

- A priority area is increasing the number of placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children so an article focussing on unaccompanied asylum seeking children was sent to a contact in Discover Islam who agreed to share with those who work/volunteer for Discover Islam.
- An email alert regarding our 'Great Dad's Award' winners and promoting fostering in general was sent to residents who had signed up to CBC email alerts (all areas – total of 2589 recipients)
- Google advertising campaign continued and various E-bulletins were sent out to various residents in CBC, i.e. those who had enquired about fostering previously.
- Regular tweets and posts continued on Fostering Facebook, CBC Facebook/Twitter etc.

9. As a result of the recruitment activities that took place during this quarter the Fostering Service received

- 25 enquiries; 7 in April, 11 in May and 7 in June (this is 1 more than in the last quarter).
- 14 Initial Visits to prospective foster carers during this period; 3 in April; 7 in May and 4 in June (this is 1 less than in the previous quarter).
- There were 7 application forms received; 0 in April, 4 in May and 3 in June (this is 2 more than in the previous quarter).
- The best form of recruitment during this period was via the CBC website, followed by the Google campaign and IFA foster carers wanting to transfer.

Assessments

10. During this quarter 12 new assessments were started;

- 6 career carers
- 5 Family and Friends
- 1 Special Guardianship Order (SGO). As of the 30 June 2016 there were a total of 15 assessments in progress
- 7 career carers
- 1 Regulation 24 (temporary approval)
- 3 Family and Friends
- 4 SGO assessments

11. During this quarter 2 fostering households were approved, 1 for 2 children aged 7 years and 3 years, the other for 1 child aged 2 years. These were Family and Friends carers.

12. As at the 30 June 2016 the Fostering Service had a total of 104 fostering households, 82 of which were career carers.

13. In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers, this broadly reflects the ethnicity of our children in care.

Ethnicity		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Foster Carers</i>	<i>Looked After Children</i>
White	173 (91%)	105 (84%)
Dual Heritage	2 (1%)	11 (9%)
Black or Black British	14 (7.5%)	6 (5%)
Asian	1 (0.5%)	3 (2%)
	100%	100%

14. As at the 30 June 2016 there were a total of 126 children placed with in house foster carers (63%), compared to 74 (37%) with Independent Fostering Agencies (I.F.A.'s). The percentage of children placed with in house carers compared to I.F.A.'s continues to increase. At the end of March 2014 the percentage of children placed in house was 46%, by the end of March 2015 it was 54%, by the end of March 2016 this had increased to 59% and as at the 30 June 2016 this percentage has further increased to 63%. Our aspiration continues to increase this further to 70%. This aspiration will never reach 100% as there will always be children that need to be placed out of the area or in IFA/residential placements. The Fostering Service's recruitment strategy continues to be to increase the number of in house local placements for our children in care which will not only better meet their needs but will decrease our reliance on more expensive IFA placements.

Referrals/Placements

15. During April, May and June 2016 there were 54 new fostering placements made: 19 in April, 12 in May and 23 in June. This is a significant increase on the number of new fostering placements made compared to the last quarter, which were 11. This reflects the increasing numbers of UASC that have been accommodated in recent months (31 in this quarter). Out of the 54 new placements made, 23 were placed in house, 4 were placed in IFA's (all UASC's), 24 were placed in semi-independent living (21 of whom were UASC). 1 UASC was placed with carers from another Local Authority and 2 young people were placed in residential placements, 1 of whom was a child with disabilities.

Special Guardianship Orders

16. As at the 30 June 2016 there were 133 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 124 for the same period last year). Although Special Guardians 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 areas Special Guardianship carers seek support with are in relation to contact; children's behaviour or support in financing respite or holiday activities. During this quarter the Fostering Service worked with 7 families in relation to providing advice and support.

Training

17. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. 12 specialist training courses were arranged and were attended by 201 foster carers. Course facilitated included; Childcare emergency first aid, Self Harm, Demystifying online technologies and internet safety and support, Supporting adolescents with ADHD/ASC, Keeping Safe; de-escalation and restraint, Children who go missing: the risk of sexual exploitation, An Introduction to Eating Disorders, Supporting Children and Young People with Loss, Separation and Bereavement, Tax talk for foster carers, CAMHS; Attachment Disorders and CAMHS; Depression.
18. Foster carers also accessed training from the Early Years programme, these included; Paediatric first aid, Protective Behaviours, Working Together, modules 1 and 2, Looked After Children – LAC co-ordinator role, Makaton workshop and Understanding the Impact of Sexual Trauma.
19. E-learning was also accessed by carers in relation to the following subjects; Attachment and Brain Development; Basic Awareness, Child and Adult Sexual Exploitation, An Introduction to Safeguarding Children, Child Accident Prevention for Parents and Carers, Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect, Pathways to Extremism and Safeguarding Children from Abuse by Sexual Exploitation.
20. As at the 30 June 2016 there were 72 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standard (TSD) portfolios. 24 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 3 households were overdue in completing their portfolios and were outside the required timescale. Supervising social workers and the Marketing, Recruitment and Training Support Officer were providing additional support to help these carers complete the Standards.

Ofsted Notifications

21. 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 reported.

Allegations

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

Complaints

23. In June, 1 formal complaint was made by a foster carer regarding the unprofessional conduct from her previous supervising social worker, the lack of support from her current supervising social worker and historical data breaches made in 2013 and 2014. The complaint was investigated under CBC procedures and the complaint was not upheld in relation to the unprofessional conduct of the previous supervising social worker or the lack of support from the current supervising social worker. In relation to the historical data breaches where the foster carer had stated her address had been given out to birth parents this was dealt with at the time. Many of the staff that were involved previously had now left the Local Authority which had made it difficult for the investigating officer to undertake a thorough investigation at this point due to the passage of time. The manager who dealt with the complaint, however, did reassure the complainant that since that date, steps had been taken to improve the system within Children's Services and that as a Local Authority we have a more robust reporting and investigation process in place to minimise the risk of such incidents reoccurring.

Compliments

24. During this quarter the Fostering Service received 10 compliments either regarding the work of the foster carers or staff within the Fostering Service. Compliments were made by the Fostering Panel in relation to the high quality of work and presentation of a number of Fostering Social Workers when at panel. A childcare social worker complimented a foster carer on the excellent life story work she completed for a child in her care. Another childcare social worker fed back regarding the work of one of our foster carers who she felt had gone 'above and beyond' what she had expected of her in her role as a foster carer. An I.R.O. complimented one of the Fostering social workers on the support she had provided to a foster carer. 3 foster carers also complimented the work of their supervising social workers, one for her support and trust, another for her patience and support and another for being a 'shining star'. She stated that her supervising social worker was 'reliable, consistent, and responsive to their communication and generally a great support'.

Staffing

28. Fostering 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 the Fostering

Agency. This person monitors and manages the activities of the Fostering Agency and supervises the 2 Team Managers. They have day to day responsibility for the management of the 2 fostering teams. During this quarter, 4 members of staff have left the service and a further 2 are due to leave in September.

Council Priorities

29. Central Bedfordshire Council's medium term plan priority C Promote Health and Wellbeing.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2001-2014; Priority 2 Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Fostering is a key statutory service to Looked After Children.

Legal Implications

30. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the activities of the Fostering Agency in the previous quarter as required by legislation, there are no further legal implications.

Financial and Risk Implications

31. This is a position and update report. There are no financial implications.

Equalities Implications

32. 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.

The ethnicity of foster carers broadly reflects the ethnicity of children in care. Due to a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children/young people the service is reviewing existing recruitment activities. All foster carers receive a variety of training which helps ensure that they can meet the needs of all children and young people in their care.

Conclusion and next Steps

33. Whilst the Fostering Service has met the recruitment targets set for the previous 2 years a more challenging one has been set for this financial year. The Fostering Service aims to recruit 10 more foster carers as well as convert 21 number of I.F.A. placements into in house ones. The Service is on course to meet the first target with 7 assessments

currently in progress but the second target, thus far, is proving challenging. It is anticipated that the introduction of a 'golden handshake' of £2,000 to I.F.A. carers transferring will prove to be an excellent incentive to carers interested in transferring and will help the team to recruit carers for UASC, sibling groups and teenagers.

34. This quarter has seen a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children/young people needing to be accommodated. As this number rises the Service has had to review its recruitment strategy and identify creative ways of recruiting carers and supporting existing carers in being able to take on and support the specific needs these children and young people present.
35. During this quarter there have been no notifications to Ofsted or allegations made against foster carers. There has only been 1 formal complaint made and this was not upheld. This low level of activity in this area not just for this quarter but the previous 2 quarters indicates that foster carers have been provided with appropriate levels of supervision, support and training to help ensure children's needs are being met. This is also supported by the compliments we have received from foster carers and other professionals who have commented on the excellent support foster carers have received.
36. In conclusion this has been a promising start for the Fostering Service, the recruitment targets are challenging and the Service is working hard to try to achieve these. A further challenge for the Service going forward in this financial year will be in terms of trying to retain the existing carers who are currently fostering. The Fostering Service has had a significant number of staff changes over the last 6 months which has meant many foster carers have experienced a change of supervising social workers on at least 2/3 occasions. This year we have recruited several new members of staff who are highly motivated and who have a very relevant skill base. I am therefore confident that we will be able to retain those foster carers who continue to provide a high standard of care to Looked After Children.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None