

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

14 November 2016

Fostering Agency Report - Quarter 2 (1 July - 30 September 2016)

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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

Schedule 6 of the Fostering Regulations 2012 requires the Fostering Service to monitor and report on specific areas of the work it undertakes. This report, therefore, reports on these regulatory activities

1. The Panel is asked to consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 2 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 second quarter report for the financial year 2016/2017.

Options for consideration – Recruitment of Foster Carers

4. During July, August and September 2016, 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 (2 in July, 3 in August and 2 in September). These included information stands at Ampthill Gala, Biggleswade and Leighton Buzzard Markets and at Asda, Dunstable, all with the Just Ask bus. 2 drop in events were held at the Ampthill office and 1 drop in was held at Chicksands Army Base.
6. In relation to advertising, throughout this quarter the Fostering Service had a page sponsor with East of England Online with an editorial in their digital magazine. 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'. The Fostering Service continued to advertise on a roundabout in Flitwick outside Tesco's store and fostering adverts were still being used on the back of school crossing patrol staff for schools across Central Bedfordshire. Leaflet drops also took place in targeted postcode areas advertising forthcoming information evenings. A half page advert promoting fostering and a forthcoming information evening was also placed in the Times and Citizen. The Fostering Service has also started to undertake some targeted recruitment for specific children. During this quarter a newspaper advert for 1child was placed in the Northamptonshire Telegraph and Northamptonshire Chronicle and Echo as this was where the child needed to be placed.
7. Press coverage took place in various ways. An article highlighting our 'Great Dad' winners was placed in the Times and Citizen. Articles about the Celebration of Fostering event were placed internally on the Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) website and in Staff Central and in the Chief Executive's Blog. Press releases about the event and winners were also sent to all local media contacts.
8. Online posts have continued to be promoted during this quarter. Articles about CBC being a fostering friendly employer, the 'Great Dads' Awards and promoting fostering in general were posted in the Connect Newsletter which is sent to all staff in social care, health, housing and portfolio holders. An e-mail article about fostering UASC was sent to individuals who work for or volunteer for a refugee charity. An article about fostering was placed in the Staff Central Magazine. An on line advert about forthcoming fostering information events was placed in the Governors Essential Newsletter which is sent out to all governors of schools and academy's in the Central Bedfordshire area. Email articles/bulletins about the fostering drop ins were sent to various contacts including town and parish councils, community groups, health, police and fire services as well as approximately 1,916 residents who have signed up to receive bulletin alerts. An on line advert about fostering was also placed on CBC's Bank Holiday Services bulletin which is sent out to 36,000 residents who have signed up for alerts.

9. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of 12 enquiries, 3 in July, 2 in August and 7 in September (this is 13 less than in the last quarter). There were 10 Initial Visits during this period: 3 in July, 6 in August and 1 in September (this is 4 less than in the previous quarter). There were 5 application forms received during this period: 1 in July, 2 in August and 2 in September (this was 2 less than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment during this period was via the website. The number of enquiries etc. dipped in this quarter which is expected for this time of year. The previous quarter is always higher due to 'Foster Carers Fortnight' and all the recruitment activities surrounding this whereas this quarter is general lower due to it being the holiday period and potential carers are busy planning holiday activities etc.
10. In mid September the Service introduced a £2,000 'Golden Handshake' to be paid to those IFA carers with CBC children in place who then transfer to CBC. Whilst it is early days it is clear that this initiative has been well received and carers for approximately 15 children have already expressed an interest in transferring.
11. In September the Service also held their Celebration of Fostering event at Woburn Safari Park. Over 200 carers and children attended, 14 families received long service awards with one couple celebrating 30 years of fostering. Individual awards also went to a host of different carers and their children in recognition of the contribution they make to fostering. Chief Executive, Richard Carr and Cllr Carole Hegley were there to present the awards and the families that attended had the opportunity to see the animals, enjoy a barbecue as well as get involved in the games and entertainment provided.

Reason/s for decision - Assessments

12. During this period 19 new assessments were started: 4 career carer, 6 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 5 Family and Friends and 4 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments. As of the 30 September 2016 there were a total of 18 assessments in progress: 8 career carers, 1 Regulation 24, 7 Family and Friends and 2 SGO assessments.
13. During this quarter 3 fostering households were approved, 2 as career carers and 1 as a family and friends carer.
14. During this quarter there were 3 de-registrations of foster carers, 2 were Family and Friends carers (1 child returned to their birth father and a Special Guardianship Order was granted in relation to the other child). The other foster carer who resigned left for personal reasons.
15. As of the 30 September 2016 the Fostering Agency had a total of 105 fostering households (compared to 104 in the previous quarter), 82 of these were career carers.

16. In relation to the ethnicity of foster carers and children placed, there is a fair 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	92%	71%
Dual Heritage	1%	8%
Black or Black British	6%	5%
Asian	1%	5%
Other	-	11%
	100%	100%

17. As of the 30 September 2016 there were a total of 117 children placed with in house foster carers compared to 74 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%, at the end of the last quarter it was 63% and at the end of September 2016 it was 61%. This increase has been achieved by the Service reviewing all existing foster carers to ensure we maximise their fostering offer. It has also been achieved by staff working with IFA carers to support and encourage them to think about transferring to foster for CBC and with work being done regarding our step down initiative to move children from residential care into a fostering placement where they have the chance to experience family life. 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 and they will have local placements to better meet their needs but it will also decrease our reliance on more expensive IFA placements.
18. As of the 30 September 2016 there were 139 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 133 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

19. During July, August and September 2016 there were 21 new fostering placements made: 4 in July, 13 in August and 4 in September. This is a decrease of 33 new placements compared to the last quarter and this is largely due to the high number of UASC being accommodated in the previous quarter which was 31 in total. Out of the 21 new placements made, 10 were placed in house (all aged 9 and under), a sibling group of 4 were placed in an IFA placement, 6 were placed in semi-independent living (5 of whom were UASC) and 1 was placed in secure accommodation.

Training

20. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 8 specialist in house training courses which included: Childcare Emergency First Aid, Help for Carers of Troubled Teenagers, Allegations Awareness, Caring for UASC, Contact, PREVENT Radicalisation/Extremism and An Introduction to Theraplay. The Caring for UASC training which was facilitated by staff from within the Corporate Parenting Service and with UASC themselves received particularly good feedback.
21. Foster carers also accessed training from the Early Years programme, these included; Paediatric First Aid, Introduction to Mentoring others in the Workplace, Parental Substance misuse and the impact on babies, children and young people and a Practice Update on Youth and Neglect.
22. 43 foster carers also accessed e-learning training on the following subjects: An Introduction to Safeguarding Children, Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect, Trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery, An Introduction to Autism Spectrum, Safe sleeping for babies, Early Child Development, Equality and Diversity in the Workplace (basic and foundation), Sexualised Behaviour, Attachment and Brain Development, Safeguarding Children from Abuse, Safeguarding refresher, Assessing and Managing Risk, Safer Caring, E-safety, Risk Assessment in Safeguarding, Keep them Safe from CSE, Behaviour and the physical environment, Child Development, Adolescence, Early Child Development, Basic Awareness of Child and Adult Sexual Exploitation, Foetal Exposure to Alcohol and Contact in Foster Care.
23. As of the 30 September 2016 there were 74 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's); 23 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 5

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

24. 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 was 1 notification to Ofsted regarding a young person who became verbally aggressive towards one of his foster carers. The police were called to the carer's home and the young person was taken to hospital, assessed and then returned to the foster carers. This young person was already known to CAMHS who were advised of the incident in order that they could talk to the young person in more detail in his work with them.

Allegations

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

Complaints

26. During this period there were no complaints made against the Fostering Service.

Compliments

27. During this period there were 4 compliments received regarding the Fostering Service. One was from panel regarding the good quality paperwork presented by the supervising social worker to panel on a particular case. Two were from foster carers about the positive support their supervising social workers provided, with one family and friends foster carer stating 'thank you so much for all your help and support over the year, it has been a pleasure to work with you'. The final compliment was from the court and permanence team manager regarding the excellent joint working that had taken place between the childcare social worker and the supervising social worker. We often receive positive comments about training but this quarter it is worth noting the excellent feedback we received from several people in relation to the UASC training. Foster carers really appreciated the stories the young people brought with them and the invaluable knowledge of the staff who facilitated the training.

Annual Budget

28. For the financial year 2016/2017 the Fostering Service within Children's Services had an annual budget of £1,179,630.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

29. 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

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

Staffing

31. 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 were no new starters and 3 staff members left the Service (2 senior social workers and 1 business support officer).

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

32. 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

33. This report provides updating information to allow consideration of the activities of the Fostering, there are no financial implications.

Equalities Implications

34. 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 report highlights ongoing efforts to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds and to provide training and development in relation to equality.

Conclusion and next Steps

35. During this quarter the service continued to focus on recruiting and assessing more foster carers. 3 carers were approved this quarter and another 8 are in assessment which means the Service is on target to meet its recruitment target of 10 new fostering households for this financial year. The Service has a further ambition of transferring 25 IFA placements into in house ones. Progress in this area has been slow but with the introduction of the 'Golden Handshake' initiative in September it is hopeful that more carers will now consider transferring over to CBC. This will not only help the Service in exceeding its recruitment target but will create significant savings for the department in relation to placement costs as it is much cheaper to place children in house than it is with IFA placements.
36. As of 30 September 2016 61% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 39% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The % of children placed in house has now stabilised between 61% and 65%. If the recruitment targets are met/exceeded this percentage is likely to increase further. Our aspiration is still to place 70% of our children with in foster carers as there will always be a number of children who need to be placed externally in residential carer or out of the area.
37. This quarter we have only had to report one incident to Ofsted following a young person in placement becoming verbally aggressive towards one of his carers. Whilst this incident was distressing for both the young person and the carers the young person returned to placement and support was put in place to stabilise the placement and the young person remains with these carers to date. During this quarter there were no complaints or allegations and the Service continued to receive compliments either about the foster carers or staff working in the Service. This is all very encouraging and indicates that carers are accessing relevant training and are generally well supported. Placement stability is good and the Service is quick to respond when placements become fragile or disrupt.
38. In conclusion this has been another positive quarter with the Service still on course to meet its recruitment target and the number of children in in house placements continuing to rise. This means that children's needs are being met 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