

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 6 March 2017

Fostering Agency Report - Quarter 3 (1 October – 31 December 2016)

Report of (Cllr Carole 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 Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 Report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

1. This report has not been to or is planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as no recommendations/decisions are required. Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to 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 2016/2017.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

4. During October, November and December 2016, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
5. In terms of outreach work 2 activities took place. An information evening was held at Dunstable fire station in October and an information drop in took place at Priory House, Chicksands in November.
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 7 foot poster promoting fostering was placed in Dunstable Shopping Centre, the image used was relevant to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. 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 CBC. The Fostering Service continued to undertake some targeted recruitment for specific children living in Northamptonshire, Milton Keynes and Gloucester. Other advertising included an advert in a Flitwick paper which was sent to all homes within Flitwick including local shops and community buildings.
7. In October press coverage took place following the Celebration of Fostering event which had been held in September. Press articles of the foster carers receiving their awards were placed in various local papers such as Dunstable Gazette, Bedfordshire Times and Citizen, Biggleswade Chronicle, Beds on Sunday and Luton on Sunday. A live radio interview also took place with BBC3 Counties radio regarding a foster carer from the celebration event who had been fostering for 30 years. Other press coverage included a half page advert in Luton News and Dunstable Gazette regarding a planned information evening event.
8. Online posts have continued to be promoted during this quarter. An E-bulletin regarding the celebration of Fostering event was sent to 5120 subscribers of Central Bedfordshire's email alerts. Articles about the Celebration event and adverts were placed in Bedford Hospital electronic staff newsletter, Bedfordshire News on-line, Connect newsletter (sent to staff within social care, health and housing) and the Governors Essential newsletter (sent to all governors of schools and academies in Central Bedfordshire). Other on line advertising included placing profiles/adverts of 3 young people needing long term care in Adoption UK; Children who wait online.
9. In terms of social media various posts were made on Central Bedfordshire Council's Twitter account and Facebook page regarding a Fostering Information Evening and the Celebration of Fostering event. Similar posts were also placed on the 'Don't let Dunstable Die' Facebook page and 'About Dunstable' Facebook page. A further post was made on the

Fostering Facebook page regarding Sons and Daughters week (thank you cards and a £10 voucher were also sent to all birth children living at the foster carer's home). Targets recruitment and adverts were placed regarding 2 specific children appeared on Facebook users newsfeed in Northants, Milton Keynes and Gloucester. Various tweets and posts were made re CBC Twitter and Facebook accounts re. working with fostering agencies across England and forthcoming information sessions. Posts were also made on Beds Fire and Rescue Facebook page and Shefford and local villages Facebook page.

10. In September 2016 the Fostering Service introduced a Golden Handshake for any IFA carers (with CBC children in placement) who transfer to foster for CBC. This has generated a lot of interest from IFA carers. During this quarter one IFA carer transferred and there are a further three in assessment.
11. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of 21 enquiries, 7 in October, 9 in November and 5 in December (this is 9 more than in the last quarter). There were 18 Initial Visits during this period: 8 in October, 4 in November and 6 in December (this is 8 more than in the previous quarter). There were 12 application forms received during this period: 4 in October, 3 in November and 2 in December (this was 7 more than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment during this period was via the website.

Assessments

12. During this period 19 new assessments were started: 9 career carer, 3 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 5 Family and Friends and 2 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments. As of the 31st December 2016 there were a total of 15 assessments in progress: 11 career carers, 1 Regulation 24, 2 Family and Friends and 2 SGO assessments.
13. 3 Fostering households were approved, all as career carers, during this quarter.
14. During this quarter there were 5 de-registrations of foster carers, 1 family and friends carer resigned because she was unable to manage the care of the child placed with her and the child moved placement. 1 carer resigned as she was unhappy about concerns being raised with her regarding her care of a Looked After Child, 1 family and friends carer resigned as she had adopted her niece so no longer needed to be approved as a foster carer. The other 2 foster carer who resigned left for personal reasons.
15. As of the 31st December 2016 the Fostering Agency had a total of 103 fostering households (compared to 105 in the previous quarter), 81 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 | 89% | 66% |
| Dual Heritage | 1% | 3% |
| Black or Black British | 5% | 3% |
| Asian | 2% | 1% |
| White Other | 3% | 3% |
| Traveller | / | 1% |
| Gypsy/Roma | / | 1% |
| Other | / | 22% |
| | 100% | 100% |

17. As of the 31st December 2016 there were a total of 124 children placed with in house foster carers compared to 72 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 at the end of December 2016 2016 it was 63%. 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 placements 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 31st December 2016 there were 140 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 139 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.

Private Fostering

19. This report does not cover Private Fostering as the Fostering Service is not responsible for managing or reporting on this area of work.

Referrals/Placements

20. During October, November and December 2016 there were 17 new fostering placements made: 5 in October, 4 in November and 8 in December. This is a decrease of 4 new placements compared to the last quarter.

Training

21. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 10 specialist in house training courses which included: Supporting educational achievement, Understanding ADHD/ASC workshop, Internet Safety, Safer Caring, Child Care Emergency first aid, Permanent fostering and Supporting the health of LAC.

22. Foster carers also accessed training from the Early Years programme, these included; Forced Marriage, So called Honour based violence and female genital mutilation, Protective behaviours, Teenage relationship violence, Lone working and Crisis Intervention.

23. There were 22 foster carers also accessed e-learning training on the following subjects: Safer caring, E-safety, Equality and Diversity, Sexualised behaviour, Child Development, Foetal exposure to alcohol, Attachment and brain development, An introduction to Safeguarding Children and Awareness of child abuse and neglect.

24. As of the 31st December 2016 there were 71 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's); 13 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 4 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

25. 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 no notifications were necessary.

Allegations

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

Complaints

27. During this period there was 1 complaint made by a foster carer in relation to the Local Authority's decision to move children prematurely to their adoptive placement. This complaint was not upheld.

Compliments

28. During this period there were 2 compliments received from Independent Reviewing Officers (I.R.O.'s). 1 I.R.O. commented on how well the Fostering Team and Child Care team had worked together for the benefit of the young person. The young person concerned also thanked all professionals for their support. The other compliment was in relation to a foster carer where the I.R.O. praised the carer for her child focused care of a new child which helped him settle.

Annual Budget

29. Year 2016/2017 the Fostering Service within Children's Services had an annual budget of £1,179,630.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

30. 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

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

Staffing

32. 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

Children and Families First.

Working as One Team close to our community.

Being great Corporate Parents to children in care and care leavers – much more than care.

Being a well managed service and providing great public care.

Corporate Implications

33. Not applicable.

Legal Implications

34. 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

35. The report is an update on the service and does not have financial implications.

Equalities Implications

36. 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 issues.

Implications of Work Programming

37. The 4 quarter Fostering reports feed into an annual report which is then presented to Overview and Scrutiny along with the Fostering Recruitment Strategy.

Conclusion and next Steps

38. 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.

39. As of 31st December 2016 63% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 37% 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

40. Long term placement stability of children is good as evidenced in our performance indicator exNI63 which look at the percentage of looked after children aged under 16 who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years, who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption. Our target in this area was 70% (high is good) and at the end of December 2016 we had exceeded this at 74%.
41. Short term stability of children has been more challenging to achieve as evidenced in our performance indicator exNI62 which looks at the percentage of children looked after with three or more placements during the previous 12 months. Our target in this area was 10% (low is good) and as at the end of December 2016 we were above this at 11.2%. Progress is being made in meeting this target as outlined by previous stats (13.5% in March 2014, 12.2% in March 16 and 11.6% as at the end of November 2016) but further analysis of this cohort is needed to fully understand why this target has been so difficult to achieve.
42. Other indicators of placement stability include the fact there have been no notifications made to Ofsted regarding any events/significant incidents, there have been no allegations made against foster carers and only 1 complaint made during this period. Foster carers are attending more training and developing their skills and knowledge which means they are better able to support the children in their care. When placements become fragile or disrupt the service is quick to respond in order to resolve issues and support carers appropriately.
43. 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.