

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Monday, 4 September 2017

Agency Report Quarter 1 Fostering 1 April - 30 June 2017

Report of: (Cllr Carole Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care and Housing (carole.hegley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk))

Advising Officer(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services, (sue.harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Annie Craig, Practice Manager, Fostering Team (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 to outline the activities in the Fostering Service in order for members to 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 1 Report

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. This report has not been to or is planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as no recommendations/decisions are required. Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 1 report.

Executive Summary

- 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. This report, therefore, focuses on the work undertaken in the Fostering Service during quarter 1 (1 April – 30 June

2017). It focuses on the recruitment, assessment, approval and training of foster carers. It also reports on any Ofsted notifications, allegations, complaints or compliments received regarding foster carers or the Service as a whole.

- This quarter is the first quarter report for the financial year 2017/2018.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

- During April, May and June 2017, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services Recruitment Strategy.
- Traditionally the Fostering Service has undertaken a lot of outreach work. Whilst this will raise awareness in the community about fostering, there is no evidence to suggest it increases the number of enquiries the Service receives. The Service has, therefore, not included outreach work in its recruitment and marketing strategy for 2017/2018 apart from the occasional information session, of which none took place in this quarter.
- During this quarter various advertising took place which included a radio advert, a Fostering banner display that was put up at a refugee football tournament and 10 adverts on the back of buses on different routes across the Central Bedfordshire area. Posters/leaflets/articles regarding different schemes (Intensive Support, Supported Lodgings and PACE (Police And Criminal Evidence Act 1984) as well as fostering in general were distributed to various schools in targeted areas such as Ampthill and Marston Mortaine. They were also distributed to the Community Voluntary Service, Central Bedfordshire Wellbeing Service, Army Reserve Centre's and Children's Centre's around the Central Bedfordshire area, TACTIC (Teenage Advice and Information Centre), MacIntyre Care Home. Other advertising included articles in the Early Years newsletter, Bedford Hospital Staff newsletter and Staff Central magazine. An article about PACE fostering was sent to the Prison Service and leafletting advertising fostering was undertaken in the Lancot area of Dunstable. Extra large posters were also distributed to Tesco stores in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.
- In April there was a press release in relation to the newly developed PACE fostering scheme. In May press releases were also sent to the local press regarding foster carer fortnight.
- In terms of Social Media online posts have been the main focus of this quarter as our statistics are clear this is the main media used by people interested in fostering for CBC. Although the Service is always promoting fostering in general, marketing in this quarter has been on promoting the new and amended schemes in fostering which are supported lodgings, PACE fostering and Intensive Support fostering. During this quarter we have had regular Tweets/Posts on CBC's

Twitter/Facebook/SEND/and Fostering Facebook as well as the Seeds of Change Facebook. We undertook a web takeover re. Leighton Buzzard Today newspaper and had on line articles in Dunstable Today and Bedford Today. We had an online advert placed on the homepage of Heart Radio, an on line article/editorial in NARPO (National Association of Retired Police Officers) and sent out E Bulletins to Members and 6801 CBC residents.

- As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of 33 enquiries; 14 in April, 6 in May and 13 in June (this is 2 less than at the year end). There were 18 Initial Visits during this period: 4 in April, 10 in May and 4 in June (this is 6 less than at the year end). There were 11 application forms received during this period: 4 in April, 2 in May and 5 in June (this is 4 more than at the year end). The best form of recruitment during this period was via the CBC website (28 enquiries) and Google search to the website (11 enquiries).

Assessments

- During this period 17 new assessments were started (this is the same number as in the previous quarter): 5 career carer, 4 Regulation 24 (temporary approval), 7 Family and Friends/Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and 1 Supported Lodgings assessment. As of the 30th June 2017 there were a total of 21 assessments in progress: 9 career carers (which included 4 IFA transfers), 1 Regulation 24, 8 Family and Friends/SGO's and 3 Supported Lodgings assessments.
- There were no new career fostering households approved during this quarter, however as you can see from above there were 9 assessments in progress which means that our target to approve 10 new career fostering households during this financial year is on course to be met.

Resignations/Termination of Approvals

- During this quarter 1 foster carer's approval was terminated by CBC and another resigned.
- The termination of approval was due to a culmination of concerns/issues that resulted in the removal of the children from the carer. A review of the carer's approval took place which recommended termination of approval. This was presented to panel and the ADM who ratified the decision to terminate.
- In relation to the resignation received, this was due to disagreements the carers had in relation to the Local Authority's Care Plan for the child in their care and the emotional impact this appeared to have on the carer. The carer's approval was reviewed and a recommendation was

made to terminate their approval, however, before this reached Fostering Panel the carers resigned.

Carer/LAC Data

- As of the 30th June 2017 the Fostering Agency had a total of 109 fostering households (compared to 107 at the end of the last financial year), 87 of these were career carers.
- 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. As part of its targeted recruitment strategy, the Service is, however, aiming to recruit more carers from ethnic minority groups in order to meet the specific needs of children in carer i.e. UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children).

Ethnicity		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Foster Carers</i>	<i>Looked After Children</i>
White	89%	85%
Dual Heritage	1%	5%
Black or Black British	7%	3%
Asian	3%	2%
White Gypsy/Traveller	/	1%
Other	/	4%
Not known	/	1%
	100%	100%

- As of the 30th June 2017 there were a total of 127 children placed with in house foster carers compared to 76 with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The number of children placed with in house carers is increasing year on year. It has risen from 46% of children placed in house at the end of March 2014 to 65% at the end of March 2017 and 63% as at the end of quarter 1.
- Short term placement stability remains good as evidenced in the performance indicator exNI62 which looks at the percentage of children looked after with three or more placements during the previous twelve months. This target was exceeded last year, it was set at 11% and we achieved 9.2%. A more challenging target has been set for this financial year which is 8% and at the end of this quarter the Service sat at just over this target at 8.3%.
- Long term placement stability also remains good as evidenced in the performance indicator exNI63 which looks at the percentage of children

looked after 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. This target was exceeded last year, it was set at 70% and we achieved 78.4%. Again a more challenging target has been set for this financial year which is 80% and at the end of this quarter the Service sat at just under this target at 79.1%

- As of the 30 June 2017 there were 143 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 135 at the end of the last financial year). 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

- This report does not cover Private Fostering as the overall management of Private Fostering sits with the Family Support Service.

Referrals/Placements

- During April, May and June 2017 there were 16 new fostering placements made: 2 in April, 7 in May and 7 in June. This is a decrease of 17 new placements compared to the last quarter.

Training

- During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided 14 specialist in house training courses which included: Children who go missing; the risk of sexual exploitation, Internet Safety and digital safeguarding, Drug education, Keeping Safe: de-escalation and breakaway techniques, First Aid, Early Years Development and Attachment, Anxiety and the cycle of rage, Cultural Diversity, Help for carers of troubled teenagers, Oral Healthcare, Developing Protected Behaviours with LAC, Talking about Sex and teaching young people to build healthy relationships and CAMHS workshops on Attachment Disorders and Sleep problems in children.
- 51 foster carers also accessed e-learning, which included; Safeguarding children from abuse by sexual exploitation, Attachment and brain development, Contact in foster care, Safer caring, Domestic

Violence, Adolescence, Behaviour and the Physical environment, Equality and Diversity, E-safety, A new approach to child poverty, Early child development, Awareness of child abuse and neglect, Equality and Diversity in the workplace, Introduction to safeguarding children, Children and young people's development in health and social care settings, Common core of skills and knowledge and Equality and Inclusion in Health, Social Care or children and young people's settings.

- As of the 30th June 2017 there were 83 fostering households that had completed their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's); 10 households were yet to complete their portfolios but still had time to address within the required timescales. 6 households were overdue in completing their TSD Standards 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 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 2 notifications, 1 was due to a foster carer reporting that a known sex offender had been giving lifts to a childminder assistant, the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) was contacted who advised to notify Ofsted. The other notification was made in relation to an allegation made against a male foster carer, a JEM (Joint Evaluation Meeting) was held and a S47 Investigation initiated.

Allegations

- During this period there was 1 allegation made against a foster carer as outlined above.

Complaints

- During this period no new complaints were received, however a complaint made by a foster carer in relation to the Local Authority's decision to move children prematurely to their adoptive placement was escalated to stage 2 of the complaints procedure. This was following the outcome of her stage 1 complaint where she raised 11 points, of which 4 were partially upheld and 1 was upheld. The 4 partially upheld points related to the clarification of raising concerns and communication regarding the carers being placed on hold. This had been rectified through the introduction of a Concerns and Complaints against Foster Carers Procedure. The upheld point related to a process issue in relation to the foster carers payment which had been rectified.

Compliments

- During this period 1 compliment was received from a childcare social worker thanking a foster carer for her 'excellent care' of 2 children she had looked after. The social worker acknowledged that there had been some difficult and upsetting times over the previous few months but that the foster carer's care of the children had never waived from being excellent. The social worker made the carer aware that CBC valued her professionalism.

Ofsted Inspection

- During this quarter an Ofsted Inspection took place and although the draft report has not yet been received, the verbal feedback received from Ofsted, at the time, about the Fostering Service was extremely positive.

Annual Budget

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

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

- 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

- 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 2 fostering teams. During this period there were no new starters or leavers, however as at the 30th June 2017 there were vacancies within the Service for 3 Social Workers and a Business Support Officer. Delays in the Vacancy Management Process (VMP), regarding these 3 posts is having a significant impact on the Service's

ability to assess prospective foster carers and provide the relevant supervision and support to foster carers.

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

- Not applicable.

Legal Implications

- 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

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

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. 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

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

Conclusion and next Steps

- The Fostering Service has met its recruitment targets for the previous 3 years. This years target is to recruit a further 10 career fostering households for 2017/18. The Service is on course to exceed this target with 9 career carer assessments already in progress. 4 of these assessments are Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) transfers, which is very positive as IFA carers can now see the benefits of transferring to a Local Authority, not just in terms of the competitive fees paid but also in relation to the comprehensive support offered. The Service also has targets to recruit 10 Supported Lodgings carers and increase the number of Intensive Support carers from 5 to 10. Work in both areas is positive and at the end of this quarter there were 2 approved Supported Lodgings carers and 3 in assessment. The number of Intensive Support carers had also increased from 5 to 8. If recruitment in these areas continues to increase then these targets are projected to be met by the end of the financial year. A further target which may prove more challenging is in relation to PACE placements. The Service have recently introduced this scheme which will provide overnight stays and support to children and young people who have been arrested and are due to attend court the following day. Work is being undertaken with Luton Borough Council on this scheme. CBC's target is to recruit 5 PACE carers that can then be shared with Luton's pool of carers to provide overnight stays and support to children needing these types of placements, on a rota basis as and when required. Extensive marketing has been undertaken and although there has been some interest, thus far, no carers have applied to be part of this scheme.
- As of 30th June 2017 63% of children were placed with in house foster carers compared to 37% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). This is a slight decrease from the year end figure which was 65%, however this is only a slight fluctuation and the Service is confident that this % will increase in the coming months. If the Service continues with its robust recruitment strategy, the number of completed assessments/ approvals of prospective foster carers continues at the current rate and foster carers continue to receive a good level of support, the % of children in house should continue to increase and the aspiration to place 70% of children in house by the end of this financial year should be achieved.
- Short and long term placement stability is good and although more challenging targets have been set for this financial year the Service is confident these targets can be met.
- Whilst the Service has seen the resignation of 1 carer and the termination of approval of another during this quarter the service have reflected on both cases. Learning achieved has been put into practice as a result, for instance, a Concerns and Complaints against Foster Carers procedure has now been introduced. This gives clarity to foster

carers and staff in terms of understanding and investigating concerns and complaints against foster carers.

- Allegations and complaints about the service remain low as do compliments this quarter. The service generally receives a high number of compliments so it is surprising that only 1 compliment was recorded in this quarter. It is highly probable that this is a recording issue so work will be done in the next quarter to ensure all staff are routinely recording all compliments received.
- In conclusion this has been a very positive first quarter for the Service. Although this is only the first quarter the service is on track with all targets set. The performance and available data for the service give a good indication that foster carers are providing a high standard of care to the children placed with them, that children are well matched and supported in local resources and that outcomes for them are good all of which was endorsed by Ofsted in their verbal feedback on the Service.

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Report author:

Annie Craig – Practice Manager, Fostering Team.

Annie.craig@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk