

Central Bedfordshire Council

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

5 March 2018

Agency Report Quarter 3 – Fostering 1 October – 31 December 2017

Report of Cllr Steven Dixon, Executive Member for Social Care
(steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Advising Officers:

Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services
Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Annie Craig, Practice Manager, 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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. The Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 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 are made nor are decisions required. Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 report.

Issues

3. 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. In CBC we report to Corporate Parenting Panel quarterly.
4. This is the third quarter report for the financial year 2017/2018.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

5. During October, November and December 2017, a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services recruitment strategy.
6. Throughout this quarter the Service advertised:
 - On 4 roundabout signs on a busy roundabout by Tesco's in Flitwick.
 - Extra-large posters were displayed in Tesco's at Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable.
 - An ongoing online advert and editorial regarding the Intensive Support Scheme was placed on the NARPO (National Association Retired Police Officers).
 - An advert was placed in Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust newspaper regarding the new PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) Scheme.
 - An article and poster distribution re PACE fostering was sent to key contacts in community safety to distribute to their contacts.
 - Articles and posters were also distributed to various CBC schools advertising the PACE scheme.
 - Articles and posters were distributed to the Army Cadet Force to be discussed at their next volunteers company meeting covering both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.
 - Newspaper adverts regarding fostering were placed in Luton and Dunstable Gazette, Luton and Herald Post, Biggleswade Chronicle and Biggleswade Today.
 - A half page advert and quarter page editorial were also placed in the Christmas edition of Primary Times, a magazine that is available to all parents via school.
7. Press coverage continued 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 the Leighton Buzzard Observer, Biggleswade Chronicle, and Luton News.
 - An advert was placed on Heart radio.
 - A press release regarding 'Sons and Daughters' week was sent to local media and contacts.
 - An E-bulletin regarding Sons and Daughters week was also placed in the Staff Central magazine (circulated to all employees of CBC).

- Articles regarding the PACE Scheme were placed in Members Information Bulletin (Councillors Newsletter), Central Essentials (sent to head teachers and staff in schools), Governors Essential (sent to all governors of schools and academics across CBC), Parents Newsletter of Fulbrook School and Staff Central.
 - An article about a meeting held with Councillor Chapman focussing on the good work undertaken in the fostering service was also placed in Staff Central.
8. The CBC website was amended to include the Ofsted good rating logo. Regular posts/tweets took place on the fostering Facebook page and Central Bedfordshire Facebook/Twitter pages either to promote the different schemes or fostering in general. There was a web page take over on the Leighton Buzzard Today website regarding the Intensive Support Scheme. An ongoing advert placed on the homepage of Heart radio was linked directly to the CBC fostering website.
9. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period we received a total of **25 enquiries**, 12 in October; 8 in November and 5 in December (this is 7 less than in the last quarter). There were 13 Initial Visits during this period: 7 in October; 4 in November and 2 in December (this is 5 less than in the previous quarter). There were **12 application forms** received during this period: 8 in October; 3 in November and 1 in December (this is 6 less than in the previous quarter). Based on the feedback received, the most effective form of recruitment during this period was CBC's website.

Assessments of Carers

10. 22 new assessments were started: 4 career carers, 8 Regulation 24 (temporary approval for carers with family or friendship connections to the child), 9 Assessments as Family and Friends Foster Carers/Special Guardianship Carers (SGO's) and 1 Supported Lodgings assessment (this is 2 less than in the previous quarter). As of the 31st December 2017 there were a total of 10 assessments in progress: 3 career carers, and 7 Family and Friends/SGO assessments.
11. 5 Fostering households were approved during this quarter, 3 career foster carers and 2 Family and Friends carers.

De-registrations /resignations

12. There were **4 de-registrations** of foster carers, 1 carer resigned due to separating from an existing foster carer, 1 set of carers resigned as they were retiring and wanted to travel, 1 carer resigned as they wanted to spend more time with their grandchild and **1 carer resigned** as they had only provided about 6 nights care for a child over the past year and did not want to expand their approval. It was not good use of resources for her to continue to be approved as a foster carer and she therefore took the decision to resign.

13. 1 carer had their approval terminated due to concerns regarding their ability to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations/National Minimum Standards and because of their inability to work effectively with professionals.
14. As of the 31st December 2017 the CBC Fostering Agency had a total of 111 fostering households (compared to 110 in the previous quarter), 85 of these were career carers.
15. 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%	71.8%
Dual Heritage	0.5%	7.3%
Black or Black British	5.8%	3.8%
Asian	3.2%	5.4%
White Other	1.6%	3.2%
Traveller	/	0.3%
Gypsy/Roma	/	0.6%
Other	/	7.6%
	100%	100%

16. As of the 31st December 2017 there were a total of 224 children placed in foster care, 145 were placed with in house foster carers compared to 79 with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). The number of children placed with in house carers is increasing year on year. At the end of December 2017, the percentage of children placed in house was 65% which is an all-time high. This increase has been achieved by the ongoing work within the Service to support the recruitment and retention of CBC foster carers. Our aspiration is to increase this further to 70%. This aspiration recognises that there will always be children that need to be placed out of area or in IFA/residential placements. However, having more in-house Foster Carers will improve services to children in care and it will also decrease CBC's reliance on more expensive IFA placements.

Placement Stability

17. Placement stability remains good. The Service has 2 Performance Indicators, 1 for short term and 1 for long term.
18. The short-term indicator is in relation to the percentage of Looked After Children (LAC) with 3 or more placement moves over the previous month. The target set for this financial year was 8% (low is good) and at the end of December 2017 the Service had exceeded this target at 7.3%
19. The long-term indicator looks at the percentage of children under 16 who have been looked after continuously for 2.5 years and been in the same placement for at least 2 years or have been placed for adoption. The target set for this financial year was 80% (high is good) and at the end of December 2017 the Service had achieved 78.2%
20. Other indicators of placement stability include the fact there have been no notifications made to Ofsted regarding any events or significant incidents, there have been no allegations made against foster carers and no new complaints 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.
21. As of the 31st December 2017 there were 142 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 143 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

22. During October, November and December 2017 there were 44 new fostering placements made: 14 in October; 17 in November and 13 in December. This is an increase of 27 new placements compared to the last quarter. 23 of the children were placed with in house foster carers and tended to be in the younger age range. 21 children were placed externally, all were aged 15 + apart from 2 babies who were placed in parent and child placements. 12 of the young people placed externally were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

Training

23. During this quarter foster carers accessed a wide range of training opportunities to help them develop their knowledge and skills. The Fostering Service provided **15 specialist in house training courses** this quarter where **191 carers attended**.

Training included:

- Safer Caring, a new approach,
- Peer pressure and bullying - experiences of under 12's in school (CAMHS),
- Therapeutic parenting with PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) in mind,
- Ways to break down barriers with hard to reach young people,
- Emergency first aid,
- Mindfulness and stress management,
- Managing violence and aggression,
- Developing protective behaviours
- Health and wellbeing for carers,
- Secure base and Placement journey,
- Managing loss and separation and
- Supporting the health of our children

24. Nine foster carers also accessed training from the Early Years programme:- these included;

- Crisis Intervention,
- Mentoring, supporting children through traumatic situations and self-regulation,
- supporting wellbeing,
- safeguarding children in the digital world; from discovery to recovery
- Introduction to supporting transgender children and young people.

25. Thirty-seven foster carers also accessed e-learning training on the following subjects:

- Contact in Foster Care,
- Safer caring,
- E-safety- guidance for practitioners and parents,
- Equality and Diversity,
- An Introduction to the autism spectrum,
- Basic awareness of child and adult sexual exploitation,
- Safeguarding children from abuse by sexual exploitation,
- Behaviour and the physical environment,
- Communicating with children and young people,
- Child Development,
- An introduction to Safeguarding Children,
- Safeguarding and leadership,
- Awareness of child abuse and neglect,
- Attachment and brain development and the role of the foster carer.

26. As of the 31st December 2017 there were

- 85 fostering households who 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.
- Three 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

27. 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

28. No allegations were made regarding foster carers.

Complaints

29. No new complaints were received. However, in December a previous complainant took her case to the Ombudsman. The final outcome is not yet known.

Compliments

30. Two compliments were received regarding the Service. One was from a foster carer in respect of the positive support her supervising social worker had provided and the other was from a foster carer who provided positive feedback regarding the Christmas social event the Service provided.

Annual Budget

31. In the Year 2017/2018 the Fostering Service within Children's Services had an annual budget of **£1,163,393**.

Reporting to Members – Legal Requirements

32. 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 they are effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Risk Management

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

Staffing

34. The Fostering Agency comes under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting Service;
- The Head of Service has overall management responsibility for Fostering Service and is the responsible person who reports to Ofsted.
 - Under the Head of Service is the Practice Manager who is also the Registered Manager for Fostering and reports to Ofsted. This person monitors and manages the activities of the Fostering Agency.
 - Practice manager supervises 2 Team Managers who have day to day responsibility for management of 2 fostering teams.
 - During this period, a Business Support Officer apprentice started
 - Interviews for 4 social worker vacancies took place with 3 appointments being made.
 - Two locum social workers left the service in preparation for permanent staff who had been recruited.

Council Priorities

35. Children and Families First.
36. Working as One Team close to our community.
37. Being great Corporate Parents to children in care and care leavers – much more than care.
38. Being a well-managed service and providing great public care.

Corporate Implications

39. Not applicable.

Legal Implications

40. 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

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

Equalities Implications

42. 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

43. 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

44. During this quarter, the service has continued to focus on recruiting and assessing foster carers. 5 career carers were approved this quarter and another 4 are in assessment which means the Service is on target to meet its recruitment target of 10 new career carers for this financial year.

45. The percentage of children placed in house compared to IFA's stands at 65%. Whilst the percentage of children placed in house at the end of December 2017 is the same as it was for December 2016 the actual number of children placed in house has increased. At the end of December 2016 there were 131 children placed in house compared to 147 at the end of December 2017. This is a significant increase and is as a result of LAC numbers increasing during this period. If the recruitment targets for 2017/18 are met or exceeded this percentage is likely to increase further.

46. Placement stability remains good with carers reporting feeling well supported. The low number of fragile placement/disruption meetings during this quarter and the fact there have been no Ofsted notifications, allegations or new complaints against foster carers made, also indicates the good placement stability figures.

47. In conclusion, the Fostering Service continues to provide a good service where foster carers are well supported, and children's needs are appropriately met. The Service strives to learn and develop practice and introduce new schemes in order to enhance its offer and contribute to good outcomes for looked after children.

Appendices

48. None.

Background Papers

49. None.

Annie Craig

Practice Manager, Corporate Parenting Service - Fostering