

Central Bedfordshire Council

Corporate Parenting Panel

8 April 2019

Agency Report Quarter 3 Fostering 1 October – 31 December 2018

Report of: Cllr Steven Dixon, Executive Member for Families, Education and Children and Lead Member for Childrens Services (steven.dixon@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Responsible Director(s): Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services (Sue.Harrison@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

This report relates to a decision that is Non-Key

Purpose of this report

The Fostering Services Regulations require 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:

Consider and note the Fostering Agency Quarter 3 Report

Executive Summary

1. 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 the third quarter of the financial year 2018/2019 (1 October – 31 December 2018). It focuses on the recruitment, assessment, approval and training of Central Bedfordshire foster carers. It also reports on any Ofsted notifications, allegations, complaints and compliments received regarding foster carers or the Service as a whole.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

2. During this quarter a variety of recruitment activities and events took place in line with the Fostering Services Recruitment Strategy which included ongoing adverts on a busy roundabout by a large supermarket store, lamp post adverts in Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Biggleswade and the start of a 4 week bus advert campaign on buses in the Luton/Dunstable area.
3. As a result of the recruitment that took place during this period, we received a total of 27 enquiries; 10 in October; 7 in November and 0 in December (this is 10 less than in the last quarter). There were 16 Initial Visits during this period; 12 in October; 3 in November and 1 in December (this is the same as in the previous quarter). There were 6 application forms received during this period; 3 in October; 3 in November and 0 in December (this is 1 less than in the previous quarter). The best form of recruitment during this period was through the CBC website (26 enquiries) followed by a Facebook video (8 enquiries) and a Net Native campaign (5 enquiries).

Assessments

4. As at the 31 December 2018 there were a total of 26 assessments in progress; 8 career carers, 7 Regulation 24's (temporary family and friends) and 11 Family and Friends or Special Guardianship Order assessments (SGO's).
5. During this period 5 career carer households were approved at fostering panel which brings the total number of approved fostering households for this financial year to 8.

Resignations/Termination of Approvals

6. During this quarter, 1 foster carer resigned following an allegation made against her. She was unhappy that a child protection medical was required and that the department needed to hold a strategy meeting.

Carer/LAC data

7. As at the 31 December 2018 the Fostering Agency had a total of 107 fostering households (compared to 102 in the previous quarter), 84 of these were career carers.
8. 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 care i.e. UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children).

Ethnicity		
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Foster Carers</i>	<i>Looked After Children</i>
White	88%	77%
Dual Heritage	1%	6%
Black or Black British	6%	4%
Asian	5%	3%
Gypsy/Roma/Traveller	/	2%
Other/not known	0%	8%
	100%	100%

9. As at the 31 December 2018 there were a total of 133 children (57%) placed with in house foster carers compared to 137 (59%) in the previous quarter.
10. 101 children (43%) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (I.F.A.'s) compared to 96 (41%) in the previous quarter.

Referrals/Placements

11. During this quarter there were 25 new fostering placements made compared to 37 in the previous quarter.
12. Short term placement stability continues to remain good. This is defined as children looked after with three or more placement moves during the previous twelve months (national performance indicator). During this quarter we continued to exceed our annual target of 8% having achieved 7.7% (low is good). This compares favourably with statistical neighbours at 11.2% and national average of 10%.
13. Long term placement stability also remains strong. This is defined by the percentage of children looked after aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2 ½ years and in the same placement for at least 2 years. During this quarter we exceeded our annual target of 77% to an impressive all time high of 86.2% (high is good). This is well above statistical neighbours (67.9%) and national average (70%).

Special Guardianship Orders

14. As at 31 December 2018 there were 161 Special Guardianship Orders in place (compared to 157 at the end of the previous quarter). Although Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers are, generally, expected to access universal services, they are entitled to seek support from the local Authority as and when required.

15. The Fostering Service continues to work with a small cohort of families who contact the service for support and advice. On average the service works with about 5 families a month and will undertake visits and provide telephone support in order to meet the needs of individual carers.

Private Fostering

16. At the end of December 2018, the fostering service were supporting 1 private foster carer's who were looking after 1 child.

Training

17. 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;
 - CAMHS-emotional wellbeing
 - Welcoming a new child into your home
 - Lets talk about adoption
18. 24 carers accessed e-learning training which included;
 - Sexualised behaviour, issues in foster care
 - Medication awareness
 - Awareness of domestic abuse including the impact on children, young people and adults
19. As at 31 December there were only 1 fostering household that were overdue in completing their mandatory Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD's) in the required timescale. The relevant supervising social workers and Marketing and Recruitment Support Officer were providing additional support to help the carers achieve the standards.

Ofsted Notifications

20. Whenever a significant event happens i.e. a child goes missing from placement or a serious accident/incident occurs the agency have to report these to Ofsted.
21. During this period there were no required notifications.

Allegations

22. During this period 1 allegation was made against a CBC temporary approved foster carer (Regulation 24). A referral was made to the L.A.D.O (Local area Designated Officer) however a J.E.M. (Joint Evaluation Meeting) was not required. The concerns were resolved.

Complaints

23. During this period no complaints were made regarding the service or foster carers.

Compliments

24. During this period the fostering service received 5 compliments from foster carers either about the support they had received, or services provided. An example of feedback received was from a foster carer regarding the assessing social worker following her approval at panel. The carer wrote 'I have every faith, you have it in your hands.....We will always be grateful you were our assessing social worker. We think and speak highly of you. If you ever question, why you do the job you do...take it from us you do it perfectly and you will have helped us make what I hope will be one of the best family journeys we will ever do'.

Staffing

25. 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 has been a number of staff changes due to staff joining the service or secondment opportunities. These changes have impacted on the fostering service with many carers experiencing changes in supervising social workers. Carers place high value on the support they receive from their supervising social workers and when they change, research indicates this is a time they often contemplate leaving. This is recognised and is being closely monitored. too.

Annual Budget

26. For the year 2018/2019 the Fostering Service within Children's Services has an annual budget of £1,092,557 (this does not include allowances/fees paid to foster carers).

Risk Management

27. Regulatory Risks; Failure to report to Members would be a breach of National Minimum Standards.

Implications of Work Programming

28. The 4 quarter reports for fostering feed into an annual report which is then presented to Corporate Parenting Panel with the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Council Priorities

Enhancing Central Bedfordshire
Great resident services
Improving education and skills
Protecting the vulnerable; improving wellbeing
Creating stronger communities
A more efficient and responsive Council.

Corporate Implications

29. Not applicable

Legal Implications

30. The Fostering Services 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.
31. There are no direct or immediate legal implications arising from this report.

Financial and Risk Implications

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

Equalities Implications

33. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization 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.

Conclusion and next Steps

34. The Fostering Service's recruitment target for career carers has been increased this financial year by 50% from 10 to 15. At the end of December 2018, the Service had approved 8 new career carer households with a further 3 in assessment that may get approved before the end of this financial year. If all 3 assessments are approved

this will mean the service will have recruited 11 fostering households which is 4 short of the target set. Whilst this year's recruitment target was a challenging one, we were hopeful, particularly with the number of assessments in progress at the end of September 2018 that we may be able to achieve the target set.

35. We have analysed why these assessments have been cancelled out in case there was action we could have taken to remedy, however the assessments were all cancelled out for different reasons and often beyond our control, i.e. some didn't meet the required fostering standards, for example the medical advice came back to say they were unfit to foster or prospective carers have pulled out or put their assessments on hold for personal reasons i.e. a carer started a new job so hasn't got time currently to complete the assessment.
36. As at 31 December 2018, 57% of children were placed with in-house foster carers compared to 43% with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). This is slightly down on the previous quarter of 59% v 41%. This is due to in-house capacity being generally full but also reflects the increasing number of children coming into care so when placements have been needed then there has been no other option that to place them in an IFA placement.
37. Our children continue to live in stable placements as evidenced by CBC's impressive short and long-term placement stability figures which compare favourably with statistical neighbours and national averages.
38. The stability and quality of placements our foster carers offer is also evidenced by the fact that during this period there has only been 1 allegation (which was retracted), no complaints, no Ofsted notifications and no fragile placement/disruption meetings required.
39. Our foster carers continue to attend relevant core training in order to develop their skills and knowledge which means they are in a good position to support the children in their care.
40. In conclusion whilst short and long-term placement stability figures for this quarter are impressive, it is disappointing that the number of children placed in house is slowly decreasing and that, due to number of recent assessments cancelling out we won't now be able to meet the 50% increased recruitment target that was set for this financial year. It is clear from research/evidence that there is a national 'fostering crisis' with councils and IFA's alike struggling to increase their numbers of foster carers. This is, according to the recent 'Fostering Review' because since 2014 the number of children in foster care has risen by 6%, however, over the same period there has been a 4% drop in the number of approved fostering households. Ofsted figures for 2016/17 evidences a steady 'downward trend of available and suitable foster carers in England'. This has been the case locally, as in March 2017 CBC achieved an all-time high of 65% of children placed in house. Since that time, however, the number of children in foster care has steadily increased from 211 in March 2017 to 234 by December 2018 (an increase of 23 children). With minimal vacancies in-house these additional 23 children were placed in IFAs which on average costs an additional £430 per child per week, equating to an additional £840k per year. This has had a significant impact on the IFA budget.

41. CBC has recognised the impact of this 'national crisis' and a transformation strategy is being prepared that, if implemented, could help the fostering service to increase the number of in- house foster carers it has and retain its experienced and valued foster carers and supervising social workers. There is a risk that if the fostering service continues as it does with the current resources in place it is likely to impact negatively on the services ability to recruit sufficient numbers of foster carers to just stand still, let alone increase its numbers. The transformation strategy is under development and, if the recommendations made are approved, will help the fostering services long term ambition to significantly increase the number of children placed in house. In the meantime, the fostering service will continue to support foster carers in being able to provide safe, stable and nurturing local placements for our children in care.

Appendices

42. None

Background Papers

43. None

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