



Report to CYPF Scrutiny Committee 27th September 2012

Report of: CYPF Provider Services

Subject: Fostering Service

Author of Report: Liz Spaven, Fostering Service Manager, 35155

Summary:

- Update on the Fostering Service developments following a financial investment in the service to increase the number of foster carers within the city and the retention strategy of the current cohort of foster carers
- Outcome of the Fostering Service Ofsted Inspection, October 2011.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	√
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the report and its contents

Background Papers:

- Fostering Service Ofsted Inspection Report October 2011 (received by the service in December 2011)
- Fostering Service Ofsted Self Assessment October 2011
- Foster Carer Skill Levels (updated 2012)
- Fostering Service Business Case 2010
- Fostering Service Key campaign 2012
- Fostering Service Annual Ofsted Datasets

Category of Report: OPEN

1. Introduction/Context

- 1.1 This report is being presented following a request from the Board and in compliance with the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards (25).

2. Main body of report

- 2.1 Two Ofsted Inspectors undertook the Fostering Service Inspection from the 3rd – 7th October 2011. Prior to this, the Service submitted a Self Assessment and Data Set document that identified areas of progress in service delivery since the previous Inspection in March 2009. As part of the Inspection process a range of questionnaires were distributed to stakeholders for the Inspectors to obtain feedback. The Inspector observed the Fostering Panel on the 4th October 2011.
- 2.2 During the inspection, the Inspectors spoke directly to a staff from within the Fostering Service, Foster Carers, children and young people, Service Manager - Permanence and Through Care Team, Fieldwork Social Workers and Managers, Head of the Virtual School for LAC, Independent Reviewing Service Manager, Lead Councillor for Looked After Children, Assistant Directors – Provider and Fieldwork Services and the Fostering Service Manager.
- 2.3 The Inspectors also audited a selection of children's files, foster carer's files and had significant amounts of evidence available to support statements within the self assessment.
- 2.4 Against the 6 Standards the following ratings were given:

Being Healthy	-	Good
Stay Safe	-	Outstanding
Enjoy and Achieve	-	Good
Making a Positive Contribution	-	Outstanding
Economic Well Being	-	Good
Organisation	-	Good

The overall rating of the Fostering Service was 'Good'.

- 2.5 The Fostering Business Case was implemented in October 2010 following a review of the Fostering Service. The Business Case involved reviewing the current payment structure to foster carers, the training and support given to foster carers and the marketing activity. The aims and objectives of the Business Case were:
- To improve recruitment and retention of local authority foster carers
 - To increase the capacity of foster carers within the service
 - To reduce the cost of using external agencies
 - To provide more placement choice for children who need looking after by the local authority resulting in children remaining within the city
 - To improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

- 2.6. To enable the skill level payments to be financially viable a decrease was made in regard to the allowance fee to foster carers to the recommended government figures. This also took in to consideration the impact the Lewisham Judgement could have on the local authority. This is a court case that challenged the basis that where a child was cared for by a family member or was subject to a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order the allowance rate paid was lower than the allowance payment made to foster carers. The court agreed that this was not just, therefore the local authority had a responsibility to increase the amount paid to 'other carers' to match the allowance paid to foster carers. The effect of reducing the allowances will reduce the potential cost on the local authority in increasing payments to 'other carers'.
- 2.7 The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a corporate priority, and is recognised as such in the Corporate Plan. This Communications Plan supports the Business Case and continues to support the Fostering Service in the recruitment of additional foster carers and the retention of its current foster carers. The Fostering Campaign was launched in January 2011 and continues. This has included TV and radio advertising, web activity, adverts at Sheffield International Venues, bus and train station, JCD sites and attendance at community events across the city. Information Evenings continue to be scheduled every 6 weeks.

The retention of foster carers is crucial for the Business Case to continue to be successful. Various retention initiatives are in place:

- Priority housing initiatives
- Increase in 'refer a friend' fee
- Skill Level progression
- Increased learning & developments opportunities for foster carers
- Celebration events for foster carers
- Events for Looked After Children, foster carers and birth children
- Increased Support Groups
- Foster Forum web based communication tool
- Voices Of Foster Carers Group
- Foster Carers Open Forums

Engagement with the current cohort of foster carers has been essential and continues to be pertinent to the on going success of the Business Case.

Recruitment activity and the retention of foster carers over the last 3 years is:

As at 31 st	Number of newly	Number of new	Total number of
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March of each year	approved foster carers	placements	approved foster carers
2009/10	27	35	223
2010/11	37	45	250
2011/12	39	47	272

3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

- 3.1 It is important that Looked After Children are cared for within the city. Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children seeks to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people by providing guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 1989. This section requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area, 'the sufficiency duty'.

The sufficiency duty requires local authorities to do more than simply ensure that accommodation be 'sufficient' in terms of the number of beds provided. They must have regard to the benefits of securing a range of accommodation through a number of providers. The accommodation must also meet the needs of children.

By continuing to increase and retain the number of foster carers within the city outcomes for Looked After Children are enhanced and it ensures that the local authority is complying with its statutory duties.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee are being asked to note the report and its contents