

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **19 October 2007**

Title of Report: **Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service, 1 April – 30 September 2007**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Purpose of Report: **To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between 1 April and 30 September 2007**

Recommendation:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report and the progress of the service

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The Progress Report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1. The Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report and the progress of the service.

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Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
None

**Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
1 April-30 September 2007**

1. Staying Safe

1.1 This outcome is fundamental to the delivery of fostering services across East Sussex and is incorporated in each of the critical areas: recruitment and retention, assessment, training, placement activity and cultural identity needs of looked after children. These are addressed in detail below.

Recruitment and Retention of Carers

1.2 From 1 April 2007–30 September 2007, 244 new enquiries were received. This compares to 230 enquiries for the same period in 2006 and 243 for 2005. The service is continuing to prioritise its recruitment needs and undertake targeted recruitment for adolescent carers, sibling groups and BME carers.

1.3 There will have been two “Skills to Foster” pre-assessment preparation groups by the time this report is tabled. The first of these has seen five households recommended for full assessments. The group commencing on 22 September has ten households invited to attend.

1.4 The number of foster carers approved in this period was 8 and there were 6 terminations of carers’ approval. The reasons for termination were two resignations, two personal circumstances, one “standards of care” concern and one retirement.

1.5 The number of assessments (including permanence, kinship and special guardianship) in progress at 30 September 2007 is 31.

1.6 Recruitment activities in this period have included successful information evenings facilitated by staff and foster carers during Foster Care Fortnight, the Eastbourne Airbourne week and the Lifestyle show at Eastbourne’s Winter Gardens. The service has continued with its targeted recruitment campaigns, with slots on both Sovereign Radio and Arrow FM Radio. The service’s “customer” status with both these stations has enabled it to negotiate free airtime during live shows.

1.7 Retention events have included:

- A Fostering Service newsletter in July 2007
- The foster care awards ceremony in July 2007 which was attended by 190 foster carers and staff. 52 children in care nominated foster carers for awards and some recorded their own messages for their foster carers which were aired at the ceremony.
- The “Big Breakfast” event in conjunction with the RAF at Airbourne was attended by over 200 foster carers who were able to view the exhibits a day before the general public, and to enjoy breakfast cooked by an RAF Mobile Catering Support Unit.
- The Fostering Service Annual Picnic was held at Groombridge Place in September and was attended by 150 foster carers, staff and children.

1.8 These campaigns and retention events continue to be successful and are delivered in partnership by staff and foster carers.

Foster Carer Training

1.9 122 foster carers have attended day courses since 1 April 2007, with foundation courses for new carers continuing to be the most popular. Again, the overall evaluation of the courses was

excellent or very good, with most strongly agreeing that the carers' needs had been met. 14 foster carers commenced their NVQ Health and Social Care for Children, Level 3, in September 2007 - an increase of 4 on 2006. They are due to complete in July 2008. The fostering service continues to facilitate foster carers who find it difficult to attend day courses by offering alternative methods of training. 2 foster carers have commenced distance learning courses, one has commenced a relevant Open University course, and the service is funding one foster carer to complete a Psychology GCSE.

Placement Activity

1.10 The service received 177 referrals during this period. 52 of these were planned respite, 29 were planned short term admissions and 96 were unplanned or emergency placements. There were 5 disruptions of planned placements. The most challenging demand for placements continues to be parent and baby, hard to place adolescents and sibling groups.

The BME recruitment strategy

1.11 The fostering service continues with a specific strategy to recruit BME foster carers. In April 2007 a learning event was held collaboratively with colleagues from the Celebrating Cultural Diversity Network. This was attended by foster carers and staff from the service and agency preferred providers. This has led to an action plan which will see the setting up of a specific support group for BME foster carers.

Permanence Project

1.12 The permanence project was established in September 2006 and works with those foster carers and children who have had their match approved at the Adoption and Permanence Panel. All children whose care plan is permanence through fostering now have a nominated project worker to help reduce delays in family finding and to achieve permanence. A family finding newsletter is now regularly produced with the next issue being published in October 2007. The first "Skills to Foster" pre-assessment preparation group for prospective permanence carers will be taking place imminently.

1.13 As part of the practice development role, the permanence project held the first permanence workshop in April 2007 which was attended by over 30 staff from Children's Services. This was very successful with the majority of the participants stating that it fulfilled their expectations by increasing their knowledge and skills in successful permanence planning.

2. Being Healthy

2.1 The fostering service co-ordinates and supports 2 user groups where looked after children's views are actively sought on key issues on a regular basis. The looked after children's user groups have successfully bid for monies from the Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) to start an allotment project. A group of 10 young people and placement support workers continue to transform a derelict allotment plot in St Leonards to a successful vegetable and flower producing garden, complete with shed and equipment, funded by the YOF.

2.2 The healthy care standards steering committee continues to monitor the healthy care action plan on a quarterly basis and is currently being reviewed. A healthy care booklet for foster carers is being produced by a team consisting of a looked after children's nurse, a supervising social worker and a foster carer. A new CAMHS single pathway referral service for looked after children has now been agreed and was unveiled at a conference at the University of Brighton in September 2007. This builds on the good practice developed by the looked after children nurses and CAMHS clinicians in working together to co-ordinate the service to looked after children.

2.3 In addition to the child protection nurse advisers, the fostering panel has access to a doctor who specialises in the areas of substance misuse and mental health. His advice on complex medical issues relating to applicants is very much welcomed.

3. Enjoying and Achieving

3.1 The placement support service continues to provide intensive individual support to 76 placements overall, and the senior practitioner has undertaken reviews of packages which has led to a more targeted allocation of resources.

3.2 In addition to the individual support offered between April and September 2007 the service has undertaken 12 group activities. 158 children in care did one or more activities which included horse riding, quad biking and skiing. These activities are always oversubscribed and inevitably have a waiting list.

3.3 The children's user groups have been successful in a bid to YOF for funding for a caravan in the Battle area for supervised and individual group work. They have also recently been successful in a bid for a "people carrier" vehicle that can be used by foster carers and staff.

4. Making a Positive Contribution

4.1 The work to reduce offending by children in care is continuing. Interagency work with the Youth Offending Team (YOT), locality and fostering service has resulted in the development of a referral and risk assessment for use by all teams. Looked after children's teams now have access to the 'Prevent and Deter' countywide YOT team led by the senior practitioner with lead responsibility for prevention of offending. Any looked after child referred who meets the criteria is guaranteed a service. This service works closely with schools, foster carers and the young person in individual behavioural change work and has a good success rate to date in engaging with looked after children. Foster carers, social workers and children can refer to the scheme.

4.2 YOT has a programme of visits to looked after children and youth support teams to fully embed the strategy to reduce offending by looked after children.

4.3 9 young people in care have received their first stage certificate as "Millennium Volunteers" with a collective total of over 1,000 hours of volunteer activities in the community completed. These young people have been successful in a bid for £3,500 from positive activities for young people (PAYP) to fund their scheme and will be able to add this certificate to their CVs which will enhance their employment prospects. This was made possible by the creative partnership between our placement support service, PAYP and the young people.

5. Economic Well-Being

5.1 The fostering service continues to work closely with the education support team (TEST) and youth support teams to achieve good school and college outcomes for young people. Approximately 20 former looked after children between 16 and 18 continue in their foster placements and are funded to do so by fostering allowances. A transitions protocol is currently being developed by the youth support teams and the fostering service in order to appropriately support these young people and their foster carers.

6. Partnership work with foster carers

6.1 The fostering service continues to work closely with East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) who organised their annual conference in May 2007, attended by Councillors, social workers and foster carers. This conference concentrated on healthy eating, with a presentation on the need for good diet for children in care, a presentation on the educational attainment by the TEST Team and a final presentation on the need for independent advice for foster carers facing allegations.

6.2 ESFCA has worked with the integrated looked after children service to enable children in care to attend a residential weekend at "Little Canada" on the Isle of Wight in August 2007. This weekend allowed looked after children to spend quality time with their social workers, foster carers and fostering service staff and was of huge benefit for the children who attended.

6.3 This year's flagship practice conference facilitated by the fostering service and ESFCA took place on 27 and 28 September 2007 and the theme was "Corrective Attachment Parenting". It featured two world-renowned experts in this field and was extremely well received and attended by over 300 delegates, comprising foster carers, adopters, Children's Services staff, colleagues from the Health Service, and neighbouring authorities.

6.4 In August 2007 the secretary of ESFCA and a fostering practice manager gave a presentation at the Fostering Network conference on their successful model of partnership working. This was so well received that ESFCA have subsequently presented this to carers and staff in Hampshire and are continuing to receive requests to give this presentation to other interested parties outside East Sussex. Clearly, the partnership with carers has led others to want to learn from and emulate the obvious success which has been built with much hard work from both sides over many years.

7. OFSTED

7.1 The annual fostering inspection will take place in December 2007 and, therefore, falls outside the scope of this report. However, the initial JAR feedback from the inspection held in June 2007 is very positive with regard to the fostering service.

8. Summary

8.1 The Panel is asked to note the performance and achievement of the East Sussex Fostering Service for this period and endorse the key management priorities outlined in the fostering service improvement plan for 2007/2008:

- To continue to increase the type and range of fostering placements to meet the assessed needs of looked after children, especially children from black minority ethnic groups.
- To continue to increase the number and range of permanent placements via the permanence project.
- To promote kinship care and establish a support group to meet kinship carers' specific needs.
- To prioritise the provision of placement support in order to maintain placement stability, prevent disruptions and sustain adequate levels of user participation.
- To recruit and retain sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the support and supervision needs of carers.
- To continue to improve partnership working with area colleagues to contain the need for agency placements.
- To develop an integrated system for placement management of looked after children.
- To develop partnership working for looked after children in transition to adulthood.
- To establish fully integrated working practices across the looked after children's service.
- To promote special guardianship orders with foster carers.
- To enhance partnership work with East Sussex Foster Care Association, particularly in relation to work with looked after children and carers' children.
- To maintain high level of performance and inspection scores, in line with national standards and regulations.
- To ensure that issues of diversity and equality are fully integrated into service planning and delivery.
- To maximise best value and manage the service by reconciling policy and resources.