

**Committee:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date:** 24 April 2009

**Title of report:** Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service  
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009

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

**Purpose of report:** To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between  
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009

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**Recommendation:** The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report

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**1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

**2. Supporting Information**

2.1 The Annual Progress Report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.

**3. Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

MATT DUNKLEY  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Steve Hunt, Operations Manager, Fostering, Tel: 01323 747191

Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none

**Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service  
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009**

**1. Staying Safe**

1.1 This outcome is fundamental to the delivery of fostering services across East Sussex and is embedded in each of the core functions: recruitment and retention; assessment, supervision and review; foster carer training; the matching and placing of children and young people with foster carers. These areas are addressed in more detail below.

**2. Recruitment and Retention of Carers**

2.1 From 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009, 461 new enquiries were received. This compares to 449 for the same period 2007 – 2008 and 376 for 2006 - 2007. The recruitment strategy 08/09 has focused mainly on the recruitment of adolescent carers and sibling groups.

2.2 During this period the service has facilitated 6 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses. 35 households have attended the 6 groups. Three households from the Brighton and Hove area have also attended the courses as the courses are offered in the evenings and weekends.

2.3 The number of foster carer households approved in 2008 – 2009 was 20 offering 39 new placements. In addition there were also 11 foster carers approved to offer children a permanent family placement either through fostering or Special Guardianship Orders. The number of foster carers approved in 2008 - 2009 is an increase of 4 new approvals on the previous year. It is clear from the service data that there is not a decline in the number of assessments completed overall, but the nature of the approval range is changing resulting in there being more SGO, kinship and permanent foster care assessments being undertaken than in previous years. This is consistent with East Sussex County Council's permanence policy.

2.4 The number of assessments (including permanence, kinship and SGO) in progress at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 is 29.

2.5 Throughout 08/09 the service has delivered a wide range of recruitment and retention events and these have included the following:

**Recruitment Events**

- Foster Care Fortnight in May 2008, two information evenings were held, one at the White Rock Theatre Cafe, Hastings and one at the Chatsworth Hotel, Eastbourne. These were very well attended with over 30 people at each event.
- In June and July there were information stands at multi-cultural events in Herstmonceux and St Leonards.
- An information and promotional marquee was jointly hosted by the fostering, adoption and disability services at the Airbourne air show, Eastbourne in August. Despite the lower attendance due to the introduction of entrance charges, 50 fostering information packs were given out.
- Two information evenings were held in November, one at the Hillcrest Centre, Newhaven and another at the Chatsworth Hotel in Eastbourne.

## **Retention Events**

- Fostering Service Newsletter May and December.
- Picnic at Groombridge Place in June 2008. 175 carers, staff and children attended.
- Big Breakfast event in conjunction with the RAF at Airbourne was attended by over 200 carers who were able to view the exhibits before the general public and enjoy breakfast cooked by an RAF Mobile Catering Support Unit.
- Foster Carer Awards Ceremony held in September 2008 attended by 173 carers and staff. 51 children in care nominated carers for awards. A number of children and young people had the opportunity to send their own video messages for carers, which were shown at the ceremony.

## **Media Coverage**

- Radio adverts run over a week targeted advertisements on local radio (Arrow and Sovereign) for foster carers for teenagers and sibling groups for five months during 2008 - 2009.
- In April 2008, Ann and Denis Holder MBE gave a live radio interview on BBC Southern Counties.
- Article in Eastbourne Gazette in May featuring Eastbourne foster carers.
- In July Ann and Denis Holder were featured on an ITV programme 'By Royal Appointment' which showed them receiving their MBEs at Buckingham Palace.
- Radio interview on Sovereign Radio, Eastbourne in November with a foster carer.
- December 2008 live radio interview with foster carer on Uckfield Radio station.
- All the recruitment events have a high profile in the local press, radio and 'What's on' listings.

2.6 These campaigns and events are always of high quality and continue to be delivered in partnership by staff, carers and the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA).

## **Foster Carer Training**

2.7 483 foster carers have completed training courses provided by the Fostering Service since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. 78% of carers agreed that the training met their learning needs, 55% evaluated it as excellent and 23% evaluated it as good. This leaves 22% who evaluated their experiences of training as not as helpful as it could have been. Dissatisfaction appears to be more to do with when and how training is provided so the Service now provides more evening and weekend courses and more opportunities for e-learning. 13 candidates have completed their NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care with 10 carers currently undertaking the NVQ Level 3. 2 carers are completing the NVQ Assessors award. 2 carers are also undertaking a BTEC in Advanced Skills in Foster Care, which is recognised as an advanced qualification in Fostering.

## **Placement Activity**

2.8 The Fostering Duty Team received 514 referrals up to 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009. This is 73 more than 2007 – 2008. There has been a significant increase in requests for Parent & Baby placements with a total of 44 for 2008 - 2009. The increase in Parent & Baby allowances has seen the transfer in from agency of a very experienced couple and a surge in interest from some in house carers, which is likely to lead to an increase in approved in house parent and baby placements. Requests for respite placements from both children living at home with their families and foster

carers increased in 2008 - 2009, with an additional 40 requests this year. A significant proportion of these requests are for ongoing respite and these, we hope, will prevent children coming full time into the system and also prevent placement breakdown. The Fostering Duty Team has met these challenges head on and continues to provide excellent matching and safe gatekeeping for children in care. In addition to this increased workload they have continued to develop their management information systems and, in partnership with locality colleagues, a new and more user friendly referral form which is now in use.

### **Recruitment and support to foster carers caring for black and minority ethnic (BME) children**

2.9 In 2007 the following areas were identified as needing to be developed:

- A support group for these foster carers, including the looked after children and young people. This group first met on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008 and decided that some of their meetings were to be in the form of a social event/activity where the children could meet other children in care who are from diverse heritage. Regular events take place with about twenty BME children and their foster carers attending. The group has gelled into an enthusiastic and vital support network for carers
- A Resource Pack including useful advice and information. This resource is now in its final stages of design and production and will be a useful information pack for carers caring for BME children.
- An event involving BME looked after children. The "All of us Event", a fun activity based day took place in April 2008 and was a huge success.
- Improvement on delivery of diversity issues during the Skills to Foster courses. Two new training sessions have been developed for facilitators of the Skills to Foster pre approval courses on issues of diversity, culture and ethnicity

More recruitment events targeted at BME communities in East Sussex:

- Research shows BME carers are more likely to be recruited through networking within BME communities. Work is in progress and soon to be finished on a presentation and flyer to take out to BME community groups and contacts. Screening calls have been completed with 15 BME applicants and 10 prospective carers have been visited. 2 new BME foster carers were approved in 2008/9. Although we had hoped this figure to be higher this does represent an overall increase in interest from BME people in fostering.

### **Permanence Project**

2.10 This project was established in September 2006 and works with those carers and children whose match has been approved at the adoption and permanence panel. All children whose care plan is permanence through fostering and are awaiting placement now have a nominated project worker to help reduce delays in family finding. The Project produced 3 issues of the Family Finding Newsletter in June and October 2008 and March 2009 which focussed on 20 children requiring permanence. 17 of these children were placed – 1 was adopted, 8 were placed in house and 8 were placed in agency placements.

## **3. Being Healthy**

3.1 The Ofsted report of December 2007 was clear that foster carers prioritise the health of children in care and that there were a range of initiatives in place to support this such as the LAC CAMHS Service which has seen an increase in staffing and referrals. The Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 2007 – 2008 stated that teenage pregnancy had been identified as an important area for development in foster carer training. With the teenage pregnancy coordinator, a new

course has been developed for foster carers which it is hoped will help carers deal more confidently with issues of sexual health. This new course will be offered to carers in 2009 – 2010.

#### **4. Enjoying and Achieving**

4.1 It was noted in the Annual Progress Report 2007 – 2008 report that the role of placement support has changed substantially from the original brief as a “support to carers” service which aimed to prevent breakdown in placements to a service that also works with children and young people in line with Care Matters. It continues to balance these two equally important demands by utilising Placement Support Workers to take on not only direct work with carers and young people but also by undertaking development work such as the Children in Care Council. In addition to managing and reviewing 86 packages of support to individual children and their families between April 2008 and March 2009 the Service has undertaken 41 group activities with over 500 places being utilised. These included scuba diving, car driving courses and horse riding. These activities continue to be oversubscribed and inevitably have a waiting list.

#### **5. Making a Positive Contribution**

5.1 The Children in Care Council (CICC) has developed dramatically since its first monthly meeting in September 2008 when 15 young people were co-opted on to the CICC from the inaugural conference in July 2008. The young people will serve for up to two years. The Service is in the process of developing a younger age user group which it is hoped will provide a ‘grow your own’ CICC for the future. It is clear that the CICC will ‘hold us to account’ and the service will continue to include them and other children in care in service developments. CICC members’ volunteering hours are recorded as part of their wider achievements.

5.2 The CICC have been very involved in the formulation of the Pledge to Children in Care in which all local authorities have to spell out what they have a right to expect when they become cared for. The Pledge, approved by the Lead Member for Children and Adult Services, in March 2009 is attached as Appendix 2.

5.3 The CICC involvement ensured that the voices of children in care were listened to and were incorporated into the Pledge.

#### **6. Economic Well Being**

6.1 The policy decision to allow LAC to remain in foster care beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday will have a significant effect on the ability of care leavers to achieve economic wellbeing. It will enable some young people to remain with their carers while they attain further or higher educational qualifications or take their first steps into the world of work. This takes “corporate parenting” one step further in giving a positive commitment to support care leavers at a crucial time in their lives.

#### **7. Partnership work with foster carers**

7.1 The East Sussex Foster Care Association has again worked with the Integrated LAC Service to enable children in care to attend a residential weekend at “Little Canada” on the Isle of Wight in August 2008. This built on the excellent working partnership developed in the August 2007 residential which allowed children in care to spend further quality time with their social workers, carers and Fostering Service staff. The expertise developed by the Placement Support Service in fund raising with young people has helped the association secure some £4000 to part fund this residential weekend.

7.2 The Operations Manager, Fostering, continues to attend the monthly meetings of the Association Committee to report on developments in the Fostering Service and Children's Services. Since October 2007 the Operations Managers for LAC and Fostering have attended monthly "surgeries" for carers to bring issues and problems straight to the key managers. These surgeries have been well attended and have dealt in the main with individual problems for carers. However, individual cases can identify structural problems and they have led to Integrated LAC Services reviewing, for example, with the ESFCA, how the process of moving children on to adoption can be improved.

## **8. Ofsted**

8.1 The annual fostering inspection took place between 3 and 11 December 2007.

8.2 The overall score for the Service was outstanding which means that all "aspects of the provision is of exceptionally high quality".

8.3 The individual scores for the following were all judged to be outstanding:

- Helping children be healthy.
- Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe.
- Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do.
- Helping children make a positive contribution.
- Organisation (of the Service).

8.4 This improved on the previous Ofsted Inspection and is particularly impressive, given it was achieved against a backdrop of vacancies in the Fostering Duty and East Team, acting up positions and long term sickness in the Permanence and West Teams.

## **Key Performance Indicators**

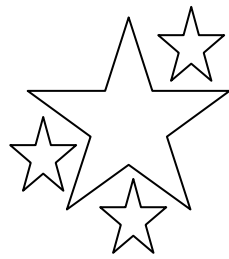
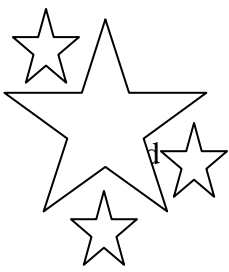
8.5 Provisional figures indicate a significant improvement in placement stability in 2008-9. The number of children experiencing 3 or more placements in the year has reduced from 8.6% in 2007/08 to 5.5%, while the number of children in their placements for more than 2 years has increased from 67% to 72%. These are provisional data but they seem to indicate that the permanence policy is proving effective.

## **9. Summary**

9.1 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 2009/2010:

- To continue to increase the type and range of fostering placements to meet the assessed needs of children in care, especially children from black minority ethnic groups.
- To continue to increase the number and range of permanent placements via the permanence project.
- 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 integrated area colleagues to contain the need for agency placements.

- To develop partnership working with the Leaving Care and 16 plus service for children in care in transition to adulthood.
- To facilitate a proactive CICC to enable active feedback and involvement from our children in care.
- To develop a web page and leaflet of the Pledge with the CICC.
- To continue to promote special guardianship orders with foster carers.
- To enhance partnership work with East Sussex Foster Care Association, particularly in relation to working with children in care and foster carers' children.
- To maintain high level of performance and inspection scores, in line with national standards and regulations.
- To develop policies and amend Fostering Panel processes in line with recent legal changes with the introduction of the new Fostering Regulations 2009.
- 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.



**These are our promises to all East Sussex's children in care and to young people moving on from care to adult life.**

***We promise to help find you the best available home, where you feel safe, cared about and treated well, for as long as it is needed.***

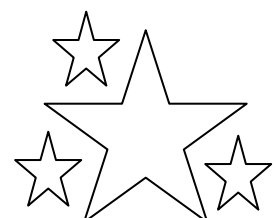
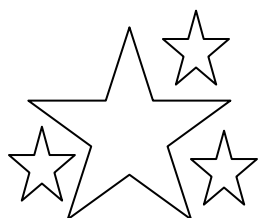
**This means that we will**

- ask you what you want,
- listen to your views, wishes and feelings
- involve you in all decisions that affect you
- give you written information about where you may be going to live before you meet your carers
- make sure that you have a proper introduction to your new home
- avoid you having to move if at all possible
- try to keep you at the same school if that is what you want
- try to keep you living together with your brothers and sisters if possible or if not, make sure you see each other often, if wanted
- expect you to be treated as one of the family, and as fairly as your carers' own children (if in foster care).
- make sure that your carer understands that you want to feel normal just like anyone else and asks you how you want to describe being in care to other people
- try to make sure that you have a holiday at least once a year
- make sure that you have a bank account set up for you
- help you follow your own religion if you choose to do so
- support you to stay in care up to the age of 18 if that is what you wish, and beyond 18 if continuing on to further education/training

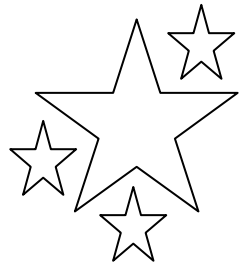
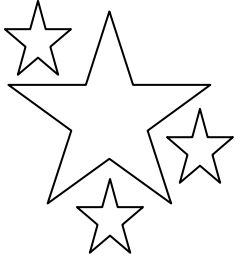
***We promise to help you stay in touch with your family and friends where it is safe and appropriate.***

**This means that we will**

- ask you how often you want to see your family
- help make the arrangements if needed
- check with you regularly that we have got it right for you
- make sure your social worker explains the reasons why, sometimes, you might not be able to see your family







***We promise to encourage you to stay fit and healthy, follow your hobbies/interests, and have fun and the opportunity to take part in volunteering.***

**This means that we will**

- expect your carers to help you take part in at least 2 to 3 hours of positive activities per week.
- expect your carers to encourage you to eat healthily and to have regular health and dental check ups
- encourage you to continue with your hobbies and try out new ones
- give you the chance to volunteer to help others, and improve how things work for children in care
- celebrate your achievements with awards ceremonies

***We promise to help you do the best that you possibly can at school, further education, training and employment.***

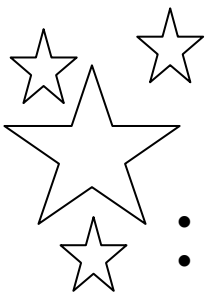
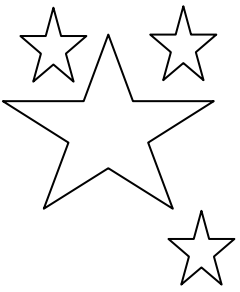
**This means that we will**

- make sure you can attend a nursery when you are aged 3 and 4
- make sure you get a place at the best possible school
- make a personal education plan that is helpful to you and that gets you any extra support needed to help you learn and achieve your qualifications
- expect your carers to take an active interest in your education, attend consultations with teachers, and encourage and support you to do your homework to a good standard
- where possible arrange meetings that don't involve you coming out of class, if that is what you want
- make sure that you have access to IT and other equipment needed for education/training
- support you financially onto further education and university

***We promise that you will have a social worker who will get to know you well and who will keep in contact and listen to what you say***

**This means that your social worker**

- will give you their mobile phone and email contact details and who you can contact in emergencies
- will involve you in all decisions affecting you
- will explain the reasons for you being in care and will be someone to discuss any worries/problems you may have
- will celebrate your achievements
- will be on time for meetings with you and will let you know if they are delayed
- will see you by yourself and regularly as legally required

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- **can't always promise to do everything you ask but will always explain why**
  - **will give you information on how to get an independent advocate/visitor and also how to make a complaint**

***We promise to give you all the support and help you need to make a success of moving on from care to adult life***

**This means that**

- **you can stay in care until you are at least 18 and we will stay in touch until you are 21 and up to 24 in some circumstances**
- **we will encourage your carer to help teach you how to budget, cook and learn the skills needed to live independently like any other young person**
- **whatever you decide to do you will have a named worker to support you into independent living who will make a pathway plan with you and provide you with written information about your rights and financial entitlements.**

**Useful Contact details:**

**Children in Care Council can be contacted at [cicc@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:cicc@eastsussex.gov.uk)**

The Complaints Manager  
Children's Services  
Freepost Licence No BR157  
PO Box 4  
County Hall  
St Anne's Crescent  
Lewes BN7 1SG

Phone: - 01273 482304  
Text: - 07797 878888  
Free phone: - 0800 3891132  
Fax: - 01273 481367  
Email: - [CSCCommentsComplaints@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:CSCCommentsComplaints@eastsussex.gov.uk)

National Youth Advocacy Service  
For help and support call FREE  
Tel: 0800 616 101  
Email: [help@nyas.net](mailto:help@nyas.net)  
Write: Freepost (NYAS)  
[www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net)

