

Committee: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 23 April 2010

Title of report: Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010

By: Director of Children's Services

Purpose of report: To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010

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

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

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Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none

**Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010**

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 2009 - 31 March 2010, 422 new enquiries were received. This compares to 453 for the same period 2008 – 2009 and 449 for 2007 - 2008. The recruitment strategy has focused on the recruitment of general and respite carers.

2.2 During this period the service has facilitated 5 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses. 38 households have attended the 5 groups. 1 household was from the Brighton and Hove area.

2.3 The number of foster carer households and placements approved in 2009 - 2010 was 26 households and 38 placements including kinship care foster carers. In addition to this 2 Special Guardianships were approved.

2.4 The number of assessments (including permanence, kinship and SGO) in progress at 31 March 2010 is 32. In regard to the assessment of stranger foster carers our projection is that we should have approximately at least 21 new carers approved between April and December 2010 which should provide approximately 42 - 50 new placements.

2.5 During 2009 – 2010 the service delivered a number of recruitment and retention events and these have included:

Recruitment Events

- Foster Carer Fortnight in May 2009, an information evening was held at the Lansdowne Hotel, Eastbourne which was attended by 31 people.
- In July an information day was held in Seaford.
- A further information stand was present at the St Leonard's multi-cultural festival in July.
- Articles in May 2009 in the Eastbourne Gazette, Evening Argus and Hastings Observer to coincide with Foster Care Fortnight.
- Radio interview with a looked after young person, on Sovereign FM local radio.
- Articles in July 2009 in the Eastbourne Gazette, Seaford Gazette, Hailsham Gazette, Hastings Observer, Evening Argus, Sussex Express.
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Retention Events

- Fostering Service Newsletter distributed to foster carers and staff in June and January.
- Picnic at Bentley Wildfowl and Motor Museum in August 2009. Nearly 200 carers, staff and children attended.
- Big Breakfast event in August 2009 in conjunction with the RAF at Airbourne, Eastbourne, was attended by over 200 carers and children who were able to view the exhibits before the general public and enjoy a breakfast cooked by an RAF Mobile Catering Support Unit.
- An evening barbecue event at Barnsgate Manor Vineyard in September 2009 was attended by 165 carers and staff.

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

3. Foster Carer Training

3.1 213 foster carers have completed training courses provided by the Fostering Service since 1 April 2009. 75% of carers evaluated the training they received as excellent and 25% evaluated it as good. The service now provides more evening and weekend courses and more opportunities for e-learning. 12 candidates have completed their NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care with 12 carers currently undertaking the NVQ Level 3. 1 carer has completed the NVQ Assessors award and 1 their internal verifier's award. 12 carers have completed the Children Workforce Development Council training, support and development standards for foster carers and some of these carers are now supporting other carers to complete the standards. Supervising social workers have set up workshops that carers can attend to get completed sections of the standards "signed off".

4. Placement Activity

4.1 The fostering duty team received 578 referrals up to 20 March 2010. This is 64 more than 2008 – 2009. Referrals for parent & baby placements total 44 which is the same as in 2008 – 2009. Requests for respite placements for both children living at home with their families and foster carers remains high at 156. A significant proportion of these referrals continue to be for ongoing respite with the aim of preventing children coming full time into the care system and also to prevent placement breakdown. Of the 578 referrals received 398 resulted in placements. The 119 remaining were not needed as other forms of support were found. The fostering duty team has met these challenges robustly and continues to provide excellent matching and safe gate-keeping for children in care. Between April 2009 and February 2010 looked after children numbers increased by 53. 42 of these children have been placed in house and it is a testament to the fostering duty team that they have been able to secure these placements while ensuring all children "stay safe".

5. Black Minority Ethnic Recruitment and Support to Foster Carers Caring for Children in Trans-racial Placements

5.1 Since the 2008/2009 report was presented the resource pack entitled "Caring for Black and Minority Ethnic Children and Young People – a guide for foster carers" has been completed and is now available to carers. It has received an enthusiastic response as a practical and jargon free resource for carers. The Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Group continues to meet and has presented two workshops concentrating on skin and hair care and cookery. The Group is presently applying to the Family Learning Fund for funding to pilot a learning programme called "Culture and Identity Learning" which aims to facilitate learning between white foster carers and their BME children so that they can learn together about their children's background and heritage. This will be extremely helpful to enhance the specialist knowledge available in the service.

6. Permanence Project

6.1 The project was established in September 2006 and works with kinship and foster carers and with children who have had their match approved at the Adoption and Permanence Panel. All children with a care plan for permanence through fostering who are awaiting placement have an allocated family finding worker from the project in order to help reduce delays in family finding. The project produced two issues of the Family Finding Newsletter in September 2009 and March 2010 with the latest magazine featuring 11 children needing permanent families. In the period April 2009 to March 2010, 11 children have been matched with permanence carers and approved at Permanence Panel. An information evening was held in July 2009 to promote permanent fostering and in March 2010 an advert was placed to attract potential foster carers. The project members provide advice and guidance to colleagues about permanence issues and family finding.

7. Being Healthy

7.1 The Ofsted inspection 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 looked after children (LAC), Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which has continued to increase in staffing and referrals. What is now embedded in the foster carers' supervision agenda with their supervising social worker are checks to ensure that children and young people are enjoying healthy physical activities on a weekly basis. There is also an emphasis on improving the children's emotional health and well being and all carers for 4 – 16 year olds complete a "strengths and difficulties questionnaire" about the children in their care. This helps target those most in need of CAMHS input. A workshop was facilitated in 2009 for the children's social workers, supervising social workers and the LAC CAMHS Team to ensure that all those involved had the knowledge and tools to progress to treat quickly any child with a high score. A follow up workshop is taking place in June 2010 to look at how successful we've been in identifying need for LAC CAMHS or community based treatment and to learn from the first wave of questionnaires. This year we were also successful in attracting Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funding of £4,000 to be part of their "Creativity for Health" Project. This project is a 3 year programme that encourages and enables looked after children and their carers to take part in arts and creative activities which encourage physical activity and the improvement of emotional health and well being.

8. Enjoying and Achieving

8.1 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 directly with children and young people in line with Care Matters. This year the service has inaugurated a "life story work" team to work with children approved for permanence to help them understand and come to terms with their life history. The team was set up to respond to need identified by our colleagues in the looked after children's teams for work not provided elsewhere in Children's Services. This 'preparation' for permanence is seen as crucial to avoid placement breakdown by helping provide more stable placements.

8.2 The placement support service managed 86 packages of support to individual children and their families between April 2009 and March 2010 while 100 individual packages were reviewed. Between April 2009 and March 2010 there were a total of 26 group activities organised for looked after children. Some 380 children took advantage of these activities which benefitted them and their carers. Within these groups there is a hard core of 90 vulnerable and challenging children who are worked with to enable them to make friends, learn new skills and to raise their self esteem. These children have also benefited by applying to the Youth Bank themselves to fund extra activities which is another confidence boosting activity.

9. Making a Positive Contribution

9.1 The Children in Care Council (CICC) continues to develop and in turn develop its members. A younger users group has now been established which it is hoped may be a nucleus for future CICC's and also a care leavers group that can have a mentoring role. Both can feed into the CICC. This year has seen 9 full council meetings and links have been formed with other CICC's most notably West Sussex. The opportunities for members cannot be underestimated developmentally with at least 15 young people currently working on their Gold Keystone awards (*equivalent to an A – C grade GCSE*).

9.2 Children's Services and stakeholders have been able to consult with the Council e.g. the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), our complaints office and the Virtual Head Teacher. Crucially this year the CICC along with Councillor Meg Stroude and the Director of Children's Services, Matt Dunkley, signed the ESCC "Pledge for Children in Care".

to find the best available home
to help children and young people maintain contact with their families
to help them stay fit and healthy and to enjoy life

to help them do the best they can at school
to provide a social worker who will get to know them well
to give them support to make a success of the move to adult life

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

9.3 The Children in Care Council has held Children's Services to account and the Deputy Director of Children's Service attended a meeting last April, at their request, to explain a decision she had made in regard to looked after children's photographs appearing in the local press. The deputy director's feedback was very positive in that the CICC reflected a mature, responsible and responsive body that listened but were not afraid to make their point of view explicit.

9.4 The CICC have also been instrumental in developing a new guide for Children in Care which should be available in June 2010.

10. Economic Well Being

10.1 As was noted in the 2008 – 2009 Report, the development of allowing looked after children to remain in foster care post 18 will have a significant effect on the ability of care leavers to achieve economic wellbeing. In 2009 – 2010 it has enabled 12 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.

11. Partnership work with foster carers

11.1 The Integrated Looked After Children's Service (ILAC) again worked in partnership with the East Sussex Foster Carer Association to provide a residential weekend for looked after children. Two such events took place in August and September 2009 for children aged 7 – 11 years and 11 plus years. Both the fostering service and looked after children's team staff helped facilitate these. The fostering service also helped fund and staff a residential weekend for children who foster where awards were presented to honour the role that foster carers' children play in caring for those children their parents look after.

11.2 The operations manager fostering, attends the bi-monthly meetings of the East Sussex Foster Carers Association (ESFCA) Committee to report on developments in the fostering service and Children's Services. The operations managers for LAC and fostering host monthly "surgeries" for carers to bring issues and problems straight to key managers. These surgeries continue to be well attended and have dealt in the main with individual problems for carers. The ESFCA have stated that feedback this year has shown that 100% of the carers who have attended the surgeries believe that they have been listened to and their complaints dealt with in a timely manner.

12. OFSTED

12.1 The annual fostering inspection took place between 3 and 11 December 2007 and there is an expectation that a full inspection will be announced for December 2010.

13. Summary

13.1 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 2010/2011:

- To respond to the continuing increase in the numbers of looked after children by recruiting more foster carers who can provide a 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 and managers to meet the support and supervision needs of carers.
- To continue to improve partnership working with our integrated area colleagues to contain the need for agency placements.
- To continue to develop and consolidate effective partnership working 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 continue to promote special guardianship orders with foster carers.
- To enhance partnership work with East Sussex Foster Care Association, particularly in relation to work 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 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.