

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**
Date: **27 April 2012**
Title of Report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service (1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012)**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Purpose of Report: **To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012**

Recommendation:
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. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

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

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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 2011 – 31 March 2012**

1. Safeguarding

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.

Recruitment and Retention of Carers

1.2 From 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012, 496 new enquiries were received. This compares to 471 for the same period 2010-2011, 405 for 2009 – 2010 and 453 2008 – 2009. The recruitment strategy has focused on the recruitment of foster carers for sibling groups, adolescents, black and minority ethnic children and parent and baby foster carers.

1.3 During this period the service has facilitated five 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses. 27 households have attended these courses.

1.4 The number of foster carer households approved in 2011 – 2012 was 23 households that offer 59 placements. Two of these were transfers from independent fostering agencies.

In 2011-2012 there were 9 terminations of approval of fostering households compared to 2010-2011 when there were 12 terminations of approval and this means that the net gain in household numbers in 2011-2012 was only 4 less than 2010-2011. In addition to this 9 Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) were granted to East Sussex foster carers.

1.5 The number of assessments in progress at 31 March 2012 was 15 general fostering assessments. One of those is a transfer from an independent fostering agency. There are also 5 SGO assessments in progress.

1.6 In September 2010 a recruitment and assessment team was established with a brief to fast track recruitment of foster carers to respond to the increased numbers of looked after children. The team consists of 1.5 senior practitioners, 2.5 social workers and 2 children's services caseworkers. The team is proving most effective in fast tracking assessments particularly transfers from independent fostering providers. The plan is to speed up the process for applicants to foster so that from initial inquiry to approval should take a maximum of 4 to 6 months depending on the complexity of the assessment.

1.7 The recruitment team have produced a new recruitment strategy to include the THRIVE targets (see below) and have reduced timescales between initial enquiries and applicants being presented to the fostering panel. The team have also amended the nationally used fostering assessment tool to make it less repetitive and more responsive to the team's needs. These actions have not had an impact on quality assurance or safeguarding processes.

1.8 The Fostering Service's new targets under THRIVE are to recruit an additional 18 fostering households on top of our annual target, 6 for children with a disability, 6 parent and child and 6 general foster carers. This will be a challenge and the service will need to be able to successfully recruit experienced staff into the 3 new posts provided by THRIVE funding.

1.9 During 2011 – 2012 the service delivered a number of recruitment and retention events and these have included:

Recruitment Events

- On 28th & 29th May 2011 the service had a stall at the Eastbourne Fiesta weekend.
- On 19th May there was an information evening held at County Hall with colleagues from Adoption, Short-Breaks and Supported Lodgings.
- In June 2011 there was an information session held in Uckfield.
- On September 22nd 2011 the service had a stall in Priory Meadow Shopping Centre in Hastings.
- From January 2012, there has been monthly Information sessions held on a rotating basis in Eastbourne, Hastings and Uckfield.

Retention Events

- An evening event was held at Barnsgate Manor Vineyard on 20th May 2011. 128 carers and staff attended this event.
- In June 2011, fostering service social workers helped to facilitate a weekend trip to Little Canada on the Isle of Wight for Children Who Foster.
- In July 2011 over 150 carers, staff and children attended the picnic at Herstmonceux Observatory and Science Centre.
- The Big Breakfast event in August 2011 in conjunction with the RAF at Eastbourne Airborne was attended by over 300 carers and children. All had access to the exhibits before the members of the public and they enjoyed a breakfast cooked by an RAF Mobile Catering Support Unit.
- In October 2011, a Children Who Foster outing took place to Lloyd's Lanes in celebration of Sons & Daughters week.
- Bi-monthly support group meetings have been set up for Children Who Foster from February 2012.

Advertising and Media Coverage

- Sovereign FM Radio or Arrow FM Radio advertising has taken place from April 2011 to March 2012 prior to each recruitment or information event for approximately 1 week prior to the event.
- Articles have, and are planned to be placed in Eastbourne Gazette and Hastings Observer to coincide with Foster Care Fortnight in May 2011.
- New posters have been distributed to all East Sussex County Council buildings in March 2012 specific to Parent & Child recruitment.
- An article was placed in the Eastbourne Herald in August 2011 about the Big Breakfast event at Airborne.
- Lamp post banners were placed in Eastbourne during the year.
- The service has been featured alongside, adoption, short breaks and supported lodgings quarterly in 'Your County' magazine which is distributed to every household in East Sussex.
- A full page advert was placed in Toddlers to Teens (a special supplement of the Friday-Ad) distributed in March 2012.
- Press releases have been released to coincide with the recruitment events approximately quarterly.

1.10 While these recruitment events have had an impact in continuing to encourage enquirers into the fostering service, it has been decided to plan for an overarching recruitment campaign in order to meet the THRIVE targets across the provider services.

2. Foster Care Training

2.1 The total number of training places taken by carers within the academic year September 2010 - July 2011 was 498, evidencing a 10% increase on the previous academic year. So far, the number of places taken on training from October 2011 - February 2012 is 275 carers, identifying a 55% increase to the previous year's attendance of 177 for the same period. So far, 83% of carers evaluated the training they received as excellent and 15% evaluated it as good. 6 carers are undertaking the Qualification Credit Framework Level 3 Diploma for the children and young people's workforce and 3 have commenced the Level 2 certificate. Overall 86 carers have achieved a Level 3 recognised qualification. The current foster carer training programme meets the national minimum standards for foster care and reflects the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training and Development Standards. Each year the training programme is evaluated and a training needs analysis is undertaken, to address the learning need of the foster carers and the departmental objectives. New courses have been identified including training specifically for Children Who Foster. Foster carers can also access departmental on line training courses...

3. Placement Activity

3.1 The Fostering Duty Team received 671 referrals up to 31st March 2012. This is 39 less than for the same period in 2010-2011. On 31st March 2012 there were 622 children in care with 515 of these in foster placements (326 in-house; 118 agency; 53 kinship placements, 15 in supported lodgings placements and 3 in parent and baby placements). The number of children in care for the same period last year was 581. Although there has been a very slight drop in referrals compared to the previous year the "churn" (numbers of children coming into and exiting care) continues to place a considerable amount of pressure on the Fostering Service when it comes to finding appropriate placements for our young people. 792 children and young people were looked after at some point during the year and is an addition of 170 to the end of year LAC numbers of 622. The LAC statistics also reward careful analysis for example, when young people become 18 years of age they stop being LAC that day but do not necessarily leave their placements. Currently we have 19 ex looked after children "staying put" in their placements. This is an excellent result for our young people but inevitably has an impact on placement capacity.

3.2 Of the 671 referrals received between April 2011 and March 2012, 468 resulted in placements being made. 63 referrals are in the process of being matched or have been matched but have not moved into placement as yet. 140 were not needed due to other forms of support being found or courts not agreeing to removal. The Fostering Duty Team have taken on additional tasks in the past year which have included finding short break and short term placements for children with disabilities and also taking full responsibility for young people needing residential placements. The team continues to meet the constant daily challenges of finding appropriate matches for vulnerable children within our current in house resources and continue to strive towards limiting the need to use costly agency placements.

4. Health

4.1 From March 2012, a new initiative to improve initial health assessments both in timeliness and quality is being trialled. A named GP for initial health assessments based in Hailsham will complete all initial health assessments. This will provide consistency and the ability to provide assessments within timescales. It will also enable the fast tracking to specialists whenever complex health issues are identified. This service is restricted to initial assessment and the child or young person will return to their birth families or foster carer's health practice for subsequent health assessments.

5. Placement Support

5.1 During 2011-2012 the Placement Support Service was providing support to 118 children and young people. Included in this figure are 71 ongoing packages of support to foster carers, 41 young people receiving support solely through holiday activities, life story work, facilitating the Children In Care Council (CICC) and supporting children on special guardianship orders. In addition, during the year 6 parent and baby placements were regularly supported. 55 support packages have been reviewed by the senior practitioner and 10 new pieces of ongoing work were arranged.

6. User Participation

6.1 The second Children in Care Council became established during 2011 and have met 12 times which included a residential weekend.

6.2 During 2011 and 2012 the CICC have been consulted with regard to a number of services provided to looked after children. This included advocacy provided by the National Youth Advisory Service and therapy by the Health Service through the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Teams. They have also requested visits to the CICC by the Care Leavers Service Practice Manager, the E Safety officer and the Anti Bullying Team. The CICC have also participated in the Youth Cabinet. Members have grown in confidence and have supported individual looked after children with a variety of issues such as contact work with their families and being bullied. CICC members met with an OFSTED inspector in October 2011 as part of the Fostering Inspection. The CICC also held a charity car wash event in October that raised £404 for two charities.

6.3 Nationally, during 2011-2012 the CICC have attended the first Southern Regional Forum for CICCs. They also joined the Youth Advisory Body for Children's Workforce Development Council as part of a short life working group that were looking at the training and development of social care staff and have attended regional meetings. The CICC have completed an on line survey for OFSTED regarding the role of Independent Reviewing Officers. They also completed the children's care monitor survey of the experiences and opinions of looked after children. This was published in February 2012. The Children's Commissioner invited East Sussex CICC to be involved in the making of a DVD titled 'Do more than Listen', which demonstrates how children feel about coming into care. The DVD can be viewed on the Children's Commissioners' website. In October 2011, the Placement Support Service was successful in receiving £650 grant from the Arts Council that helped fund arts award and media activities. The CICC representatives have also written articles for their annual newsletter.

7. Independence

7.1 In 2011-2012 the placement support service linked up with the "Care to Work" strategic group which works with local partners to improve the employability of East Sussex care leavers. Placement support activities are designed to have an educative and "preparation for work" theme. This can be by directly providing training for young people, for example in first aid, internet safety, or indirectly by increasing computing and literacy skills, as a consequence of writing and editing the CICC newsletter and reviewing the pledge to children in care. The close partnership is of further benefit to looked after children as scarce resources can be targeted to those who need it most.

8. Partnership work with foster carers

8.1 The Integrated Looked After Children's Service (ILAC) has again worked in partnership with the East Sussex Foster Carer Association to staff residential weekends for looked after children. Two such events took place in August and October 2011 for children: the first for children aged 7 – 11 years with 30 children attending, and the second for children aged 11 plus years with 40 children attending. Both the Fostering Service and Looked After Children's Team staff helped to facilitate these. The Fostering Service also helped to staff a

residential weekend for children who foster in June 2011 where almost 50 children were thanked for the role they play in fostering. From February 2012, bi-monthly support meetings have been set up for children who foster and they now have access to our “out of hours” advice line. The CICC have also arranged an activities day with children who foster to take place in 2012-2013.

8.2 The Operations Manager, Fostering continues to attend the monthly meetings of the East Sussex Foster Carers Association (ESFCA) management group to report on developments in the Fostering Service and Children’s Services. The Operations Managers for LAC and The Fostering Service continue to host monthly “surgeries” for foster carers to bring issues and problems straight to key managers. Feedback continues to show that 100% of the carers who have attended these surgeries believe that they have been listened to and their concerns and issues dealt with in a timely manner.

9. The Supported Lodgings Service

9.1 Supported lodgings providers provide much needed placement provision for care leavers and homeless young people in the East Sussex area. There are currently 34 households providing 55 placements to these user groups. 5 new households were approved in 2011 – 2012 providing 7 placements and currently there are 4 assessments being carried out which should provide a further 4 new placements. Between 2011 -2012 the Service received 191 referrals for placements. 81 of these were for care leavers with 62 of them placed, 108 were for homeless young people of whom 75 were placed, 1 was for a young person needing a move directly from a psychiatric unit and 1 was for a young person managed within the disability service both of whom were placed. For most young people the aim of the service is to work with them to achieve the stability required for them to move on to their own independent accommodation.

10. The Children’s Disability and Fostering Service

10.1 The Children’s Disability & Short Breaks Fostering Service has, since September 2011, been integrated into The Fostering Service. A priority is to increase the number of respite and general foster carers for disabled children and to lessen the dependence on expensive agency placements. Bringing staff with expertise and confidence about disability issues to the fostering service has supported the development of staff within the existing mainstream service. For example, one supervising social worker has joined the assessment and recruitment team. This year we have transferred 2 agency foster families with East Sussex children with disabilities in placement, into the fostering service saving approximately £100K per year.

11. OFSTED

11.1 The Fostering Service was inspected between 31st October and 4th November 2011. The measures used by the inspectors and the rating for each are as follows:-

Helping children to be healthy: This area was rated as “outstanding” with the inspectors stating that children, “make excellent progress in relation to their health as staff and carers are skilled in ensuring that they receive the services they need”.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe: This area was rated “outstanding” with the inspectors stating that children and young people, “live in homes that provide them with good levels of comfort security and safety” and “Foster carers have easy access to training in health and safety issues and this ensures that they have the skills and knowledge to keep young people safe”.

Helping children achieve and enjoy what they do: This area was rated “outstanding” with the inspectors quoting a young person who said that his carers are, “...always encouraging me to go to university” and a foster carer who stated that the service had encouraged them to

them to support a young person in their care to, "...reach his full potential". They also praised placement support service staff who were, "...highly motivated and creative" in the ways they supported foster carers efforts to ensure children enjoyed, achieved and had excellent outcomes.

Helping children make a positive contribution: This area was rated "outstanding" with the inspectors stating that, "Young people are provided with highly personalised care that promotes all aspects of their individuality. This helps them develop a positive self view, emotional resilience and a good knowledge and understanding of their background. This enables children to engage with their peers and community in a much more positive and fulfilling way."

Achieve economic wellbeing: This area was rated "outstanding" and the inspectors quoted a young person's social worker as stating that, "The Virtual school, (supervising) social worker, (foster) carer and health services all have high aspirations for young people and are creative in offering options to promote independence and offer a bright future".

Organisation: This final area was also rated as "outstanding" with staff quoted as stating that the great strength of the organisation is, ".....the high level of support provided by management" which helps them to, ".....effectively and efficiently deliver a service that meets the needs of its users". They also quoted a foster carer as stating that their supervising social workers were "fantastic" and "on the ball" and another saying that they were proud to be, "...part of the East Sussex Fostering Service".

The Fostering Service maintained the overall rating of outstanding and in fact improved on the last inspection because all aspects of the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standard were met and therefore there were no "notifications for improvements".

12 Summary

12.1 Clearly this has been a challenging but productive and successful year for the service. The key management priorities outlined in the fostering service improvement plan for 2012/2013 will be:

1. To focus on recruitment and assessment via the specialised assessment & recruitment team to maximise enquiries from prospective applicants to foster and reduce timescales from initial enquiries to approval of new foster carers
2. To implement and embed the new Fostering Services Regulations (England) 2011, National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2011, Children Act Guidance : Volume 4 : 2011, and Volume 2 : Care Planning, Placement and Case Review. The Fostering Service will need to update operational instructions and policies and procedures.
3. To prioritise the provision of placement support in order to maintain placement stability, prevent disruptions and sustain adequate levels of user participation. The recent visit from the Department of Education practice research teams commented extremely positively on our model of provision which they saw as crucial to supporting safe, secure and nurturing placements.
4. To recruit and retain sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the support and supervision needs of carers. This will include the need to successfully recruit to three new social worker posts to attain the THRIVE foster carer recruitment targets.

5. To continue to improve partnership working with locality social work, family assessment service, and LAC colleagues to contain the need for agency placements.
6. To develop partnership working for children in care in transition to adulthood.
7. To continue to facilitate a proactive CICC to enable active feedback and involvement from our children in care.
8. To continue to promote special guardianship orders with foster carers.
9. To enhance partnership work with East Sussex Foster Care Association, particularly in relation to the “delegation of responsibility” to foster carers and the Foster Carers’ Charter which was launched by the assistant director, Children’s Services and the chair of the East Sussex Foster Care Association in May 2011.
10. To ensure that issues of diversity and equality are fully integrated into service planning and delivery.
11. To meet the demands of the THRIVE programme and hence contribute to managing resources and performance in ESCC.

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