

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**
Date: **19 April 2013**
By: **Director of Children's Services**
Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013**
Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between
1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013**

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 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 2012 – 31 March 2013, 528 new enquiries were received. This compares to 496 for the same period 2011-2012, 471 for 2010 – 2011 and 405 for 2010 – 2011. The recruitment strategy has focused on the recruitment of foster carers for children and young people of all ages. Specific targeted events for parent and child foster carers and those for children with

1.3 During this period the service has facilitated seven 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses. 43 households have attended these courses. This compares to five courses being held last year and the attendance of 27 households in 2011-2012. The Children in Care Council (CICC) now help to facilitate these preparation groups and this is working extremely well.

1.4 The number of foster carer households approved in 2012–2013 was 43 households that offer 76 placements. The number of approvals is just slightly short of the service's challenging THRIVE target and is a significant improvement on the previous year where there were 23 households approved offering 35 placements. 5 of these household were transfers from independent fostering providers. There were 6 East Sussex looked after children placed in these placements and 2 children with disabilities receiving short breaks. After the deduction of the East Sussex foster carer allowances paid to these foster carers these transfers equate to a saving to East Sussex of £114,730.72 per year in agency fees. The most recent OFSTED survey states that nationally in 2011-2012 there were 7,400 foster carers recruited but 4,800 were lost. Fostering Network research states that nationally 13% of foster carers resign or their approvals are terminated each year. In 2012-2013 East Sussex lost 7.1% of their foster carers which in retention terms is far better than the national average.

1.5 There were 12 general fostering assessments in progress at 31 March 2013. One of those is a transfer from an independent fostering provider. There are also enquiries from 6 foster carers currently approved by independent fostering agencies expressing interest in transferring to East Sussex County Council.

1.6 The recruitment and assessment team has grown and now consists of 1.5 senior practitioners, 5 social workers and 2 children's services caseworkers. The team has been effective in speeding up the process for applicants to foster so that from initial inquiry to approval now takes a maximum of 6 to 8 months depending on the complexity of the assessment. They have been able to fast track transfer assessments from foster carers approved with independent fostering providers. In two cases the transfers of foster carers from independent fostering agencies have taken as little as 6 weeks from initial enquiry to approval. The team has also developed a system that enables the service to 'stay in touch' with applicants who are not able to foster now but may be a potential future resource. The recruitment and assessment team have reviewed and amended their processes and recording systems to ensure they are effective, informative and timely.

1.7 During 2012–2013 the service delivered a number of recruitment and retention events and these have included:

Recruitment Events

- Monthly information evenings have been held (excluding August and December) – 10 general sessions (five in Eastbourne, three in Hastings, two in Uckfield) :
- In March 2012 there was an additional specific information session in Eastbourne for potential foster carers for parent and child placements.
- In May 2013 there is planned an additional specific information session in Eastbourne for potential foster carers for children with disabilities.

Retention Events

- In April 2012, an event was held at Knockhatch for children who foster.
- In May 2012, an event was held at the Hop Farm for carers, children and staff.
- In June 2012, an evening event was held at Barnsgate Manor Vineyard to say 'Thank You' to our carers and this was attended by carers and staff.
- In July 2012, an event was held at Knockhatch for carers, children and staff. We also invited children's social workers.
- In October 2012, a 'children who foster' outing took place at Lloyd's Lanes in celebration of Sons & Daughters week.
- Support group meetings were held for 'children who foster' in April, June, August and October and December 2012.

Advertising and Media Coverage

- Sovereign FM Radio or Arrow FM Radio advertising has taken place from April 2012 to March 2013. This has consisted of a generic advert on a rolling basis, specific ongoing adverts prior to each recruitment or information event and some additional short 'filler' adverts.
- Advertisements have been placed in local papers specific to the area of each fostering recruitment event 1 week prior to the event taking place. In addition on three occasions there were articles featuring stories relating to foster carers living in the area. These articles coincided with the advertisements in the paper and the events taking place.
- Articles have been placed in the Eastbourne Gazette and the Hastings Observer and will be repeated to coincide with 'Foster Care Fortnight' in May 2013.
- Lamp post banners were placed in Eastbourne throughout the year.
- The service has been featured alongside, adoption, short breaks and supported lodgings services quarterly in 'Your County' magazine which is distributed to every household in East Sussex.

2. Foster Care Training

2.1 The total number of training places taken by carers within the academic year September 2011 – July 2012 was 609, evidencing a 20% increase on the previous academic year. So far, the number of places taken on training courses from October 2012 – February 2013 by foster carers was 409, identifying a 12% increase to the previous year's attendance. Overall the carers evaluated the training they received as excellent. 6 carers are undertaking the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) qualification for Children and Young People's Workforce, alongside 2 carers undertaking their Training Assessment Quality Assurance awards in assessment and quality assurance. Evaluation of the QCF courses identifies the carers' increased knowledge, particularly in the areas of legislation, children rights, safeguarding and the role of other professionals. In addition carers have developed their reflective practice, which has further improved their care provision. Each year the training programme is evaluated and quality assurances are undertaken. New identified courses this year have been on Dental Health Hygiene, Children who are at risk of sexual exploitation/trafficking, and Moving to Independence. Each course has been evaluated as excellent. Foster carers have also accessed corporate/departmental training courses and online courses.

3. Placement Activity

3.1 The Fostering Duty Team received 450 referrals up to 28th February 2013. This is 176 less than for the same period in 2010-2011. On 28th February 2013 there were 597 children in care with 483 of these in foster placements (297 in-house; 120 agency; 45 kinship placements, 17 in supported lodgings placements and 4 in parent and baby placements). The number of children in foster care for the same period last year was 511. Although there has been a 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.

3.2 The number of looked after children as of 31st March 2013 was 596. The looked after children (LAC) statistics reward careful analysis. For example, when young people become 18 years of age they stop being looked after children that day but do not necessarily leave their placements. In addition we have significant numbers of our foster carers who continue to care for our looked after children but who are now placed permanently with them under special guardianship orders. 23 children are currently subject to special guardianship orders with East Sussex foster carers and a further 11 special guardianship assessment orders are underway. 6 fostering households have either been assessed or are in the process of being assessed as adoptive parents for 8 children subject to care orders.

3.3 Of the 450 referrals received between 1st April 2012 and 28th February 2013, 382 resulted in placements being made. The remainder of referrals are either in the process of being matched or some are no longer needed due to other forms of support being found or courts not agreeing to removal.

3.4 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. The challenge at present is to match complex children with newly approved foster carers and to ensure support packages are in place before the children are placed so that foster carers are adequately supported to deal with our most challenging looked after children.

4. Health

4.1 From March 2012, a new initiative was trialled to improve initial health assessments both in timeliness and quality of these assessments. A named GP for initial health assessments based in Hailsham now completes all initial health assessments. This provides consistency and the ability to ensure assessments are completed within timescales. This initiative enables the fast tracking to specialists whenever complex health issues are identified. This new initiative has proved very successful with 80% of initial health assessments being completed within timescales during 2012 – 2013 as compared to 52% in 2011 – 2012.

5. Placement Support

5.1 The Placement Support Service is currently supporting 116 children, young people and their foster carers with 89 tailored packages of support. In 2012 – 2013, 90 packages were reviewed with 10 pieces of work ending as “aim achieved” and 19 new pieces of work were commissioned. The Service also continues to provide successful life story work for some of our looked after children. In 2012 – 2013 7 pieces of work with children and young people were completed with 6 currently underway. Staff from the service have been assimilated into the Single Status framework and are very pleased with the outcome of the review which recognised the breadth of their unique knowledge and skill base.

6. User Participation

6.1 The CICC have met 15 times during 2012-2013. All activities undertaken by the CICC have an educational function which aims to enable those taking part to achieve, strengthen confidence and develop their independent skills. To this end 10 members of the CICC have achieved their gold Keystone award and 3 have achieved the platinum award which is the equivalent of GCSE A*. A

further 9 CICC members were based in different ESCC workplaces during 'National Takeover Day' in November 2012.

6.2 In addition, the CICC have been involved in many national consultations. The CICC met with members of The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) to discuss the health and well being of looked after children. A CICC representative met with Shadow Children's Minister, Catherine McKinnell, at Westminster who wanted to know more about the issues for young people in care. CICC representatives also sit on the Children's Minister Advisory group and have attended the following sessions: in May 2012 'siblings in care and contact', in July 2012 'looked after children and education', in September 2012 'looked after children and health', and in December 'social workers and other professionals'.

6.3 In 2012 – 2013 there have been significant new developments for the Children in Care Council. The CICC now participate in the Skills to Foster Preparation Groups for prospective foster carers and along with other young people in care were filmed for the foster carer's and adopter's recruitment campaign 'Fillaspace'. The CICC now attend the younger user group (YUG) to ensure they are alert to issues affecting junior aged looked after children. The CICC have also started to develop links with children's residential homes and regularly visit to offer support. The CICC have initiated the development of a regional CICC group with West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council.

7. Partnership work with foster carers

7.1 The Integrated Looked After Children's Service (ILAC) continues to work in partnership with the East Sussex Foster Carer Association (ESFCA) to staff residential weekends for looked after children. This year 3 residential events took place. In April for the first time a residential weekend was hosted for 16 to 18 year olds which successfully attracted 20 young people. The event was themed around 'leaving care'. In August there were 2 residential weekends for 7 to 11 year olds and 11 to 16 year olds which attracted a total of 26 attendees. As usual these events were oversubscribed. Staff from the Fostering Service and Looked After Children's Teams helped to facilitate these events and staff also took part in 2 fundraising events with the ESFCA. The CICC also arranged a joint activities day with children who foster which took place in August and was attended by 81 children and young people.

7.2 The Operations Manager Fostering continues to attend the monthly meetings of the ESFCA management group to report on developments in the Fostering Service and Children's Services. There is now a standing item at the meeting which asks for feedback from foster carers and enables them to raise issues quickly to allow for a speedier resolution. The Operations Managers for Looked After Children and The Fostering Service and the Chair of the ESFCA continue to host monthly 'surgeries' for foster carers who can bring issues and problems directly to key managers. In 2012 – 2013 11 foster carers attended the surgeries to discuss issues as diverse as wanting to change a young person's school to being refused consideration of an assessment to adopt a child in placement. In these two examples the change of school place was achieved and a successful adoption assessment undertaken. 3 foster carers were booked into surgeries but did not have to attend as their concerns were successfully dealt with prior to attendance. Feedback continues to show that carers who have attended these surgeries believe that they have been listened to and their concerns and issues dealt with in a timely manner.

8. The Supported Lodgings Service

8.1 Supported lodgings providers continue to offer much needed placement provision for care leavers and homeless young people in the East Sussex area. There are currently 36 households providing 53 placements to these young people. 6 new households were approved in 2012 - 2013 providing 6 placements and currently there are 2 assessments being carried out which should provide a further 2 new placements by the end of the financial year. Between 2012 and 2013 the Service received 149 referrals for placements. 77 of these were for care leavers with 58 of them placed and 72 were for homeless young people of whom 49 were placed. Two placements were for young people needing to move directly from hospital. Both had significant psychiatric and physical

health needs. The Service also provided housing options for several young people that were “electronically tagged” and who had significant involvement from the Youth Offending Service. 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. A pilot scheme is beginning in April 2013 when the Service hope to approve one ‘Enhanced Supported Lodgings Provider’ who will offer accommodation for our care leavers with the most complex and challenging needs.

9. OFSTED

9.1 The Fostering Service was inspected between 31st October and 4th November 2011 and was again rated “outstanding” with no areas identified for improvement. The proposed new Ofsted inspection framework for Looked After Children has not yet been issued for consultation. However, it is proposed that all settings inspections (with the exception of children’s homes) will be integrated into the new inspection framework for Looked After Children.

10. Summary

10.1 The Panel is asked to note the performance and achievement of the East Sussex Fostering Service for this period and to endorse the key management priorities outlined in the fostering service improvement plan for 2012/2013:

- To continue with the excellent achievement of recruiting foster carers in line with our ambitious THRIVE targets.
- To continue revising policies, procedures and operational instructions including updating the foster carer’s handbook particularly in light of anticipated government changes to recruitment and assessment of foster carers.
- To continue 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. This will be crucial to retaining our recently recruited foster carers and to meeting our challenging THRIVE recruitment target for 13/14.
- To continue to improve partnership working with locality social work, the family assessment service, and LAC colleagues to limit the need for agency placements.
- To continue to facilitate a proactive CICC to enable active feedback and involvement from our children in care at both a national and local level.
- To continue to promote special guardianship and adoption orders with foster carers. The promotion of adoption and special guardianship orders is a significant contribution to achieving permanence and the reduction of looked after children numbers.
- To enhance partnership work with ESFCA particularly in relation to the “delegation of responsibility” to foster carers, and the launch of East Sussex’s Foster Carers’ Charter. The East Sussex County Council and ESFCA Charter is due to be signed and endorsed by the assistant director of Children’s Services and the Chair of the ESFCA on the 20th April 2013 at the ECFCA annual conference.

STEVE HUNT
Operations Manager Fostering Service

