

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **2 May 2014**

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

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service  
1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between  
1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014**

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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.

LIZ RUGG  
Acting 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 2013 – 31 March 2014

### 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 The recruitment and assessment team consists of 1.5 senior practitioners, 4 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. The recruitment and retention team have been able to fast track transfer assessments from foster carers approved with independent fostering providers. 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.

1.3 From 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014, 542 new enquiries were received. This compares to 533 for the same period 2012-2013, 522 for 2011-2012 and 471 for 2010-11. The recruitment strategy has focused on the recruitment of foster carers for children and young people of all ages.

1.4 During this period the service has facilitated ten 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses. 37 households have attended these courses. This compares to 7 courses being held last year and the attendance of 41 households in 2012-2013. The Children in Care Council (CICC) are still helping to facilitate these preparation groups and this continues to work extremely well.

1.5 The number of foster carer households approved in 2013-2014 was 43 households that offer 77 placements. The number of approvals meets the service's challenging THRIVE target and is the same number as the previous year where there were 43 households approved offering 76 placements. 13 of these households were transfers from independent fostering providers. There was 1 East Sussex looked after child placed in one of the households. 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 £16,900 per year in agency fees. The service also receives income of £9,909 per year for another authority's looked after child placed with foster carers who transferred in to East Sussex. The most recent OFSTED survey states that nationally in 2012-2013 there were 7,227 foster carers recruited but 4,759 were lost through resignation or termination of approval. The same survey states that there are 42,591 foster carers nationally so that means 11% of foster carers are lost nationally per year. In 2013-2014 East Sussex lost 6.6% of their foster carers which in retention terms is significantly better than the national average.

1.6 There were 11 general fostering assessments in progress at 31 March 2014. 3 of these are transfers from independent fostering providers. There are also enquiries from 2 other foster carers currently approved by independent fostering agencies expressing interest in transferring to East Sussex County Council.

1.7 During 2013-2014 the service delivered a number of recruitment and retention events and these have included:

## **Recruitment Events**

- Monthly information evenings have been held (excluding December) – 11 general sessions (6 in Eastbourne, 5 in Hastings) plus 1 in Eastbourne and 1 in Uckfield as joint events with Adoption. The team also attended Priory Meadow shopping centre in Hastings for one day, Lewes Farmer's Market and an Open Day at Raystede animal shelter.

## **Retention Events**

- In April 2013, an event was held at Knockhatch for children who foster.
- In June 2013, an event was held at the Kent & East Sussex Railway for carers, children and staff.
- In August 2013, an event was held at Knockhatch for carers, children and staff. We also invited children's social workers.
- In September 2013, 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 October 2013, a 'children who foster' outing took place at Lloyd's Lanes in celebration of Sons & Daughters week.
- Skills to Foster sessions for 'children who foster' were held in October 2013 and March 2014.

## **Advertising and Media Coverage**

- Sovereign FM Radio and Arrow FM Radio advertising has taken place from April 2013 to March 2014. 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.
- Articles have been placed in the Eastbourne Gazette and the Hastings Observer and will be repeated to coincide with 'Foster Care Fortnight' in May 2014.
- Lamp post banners were placed in Eastbourne throughout certain times of the year.
- Advertisements have been placed on M.A.Displays vans in both Hastings and Eastbourne areas 3 times between April 2013 and March 2014
- 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 places taken up for the last academic year (October to June 2013) was 624, evidencing a slight increase from the previous year's number which was 609. So far, the number of places taken up on training courses from October 2013 - February 2014 by foster carers is 319. Overall the courses are evaluated by participants as excellent. There have been some new courses introduced within the current programme, particularly embracing technology and internet use, including Fostering in a Digital World, Record Keeping (including Digital Records) and Basic Computer skills. The foster carers who have attended these courses have all identified a need for ongoing training within this area. We are currently recruiting foster carers, to train them to become digital mentors to offer one to one training and support to the foster carers who require additional help. We have sought the views from the Children in Care Council regarding their internet use and have incorporated their views, in particular, 'carers should be up to date, and they should not stop our use because they don't understand.'

2.2 Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Trafficking courses have also received positive feedback, for example, 'Very informative and enjoyable. I would recommend this course for all carers'. The identification of social workers accessing the courses provided to foster carers is a common theme within the feedback received. Life Story Work is a further course that has been highly recommended for both foster carers and social workers.

2.3 There are currently 12 foster carers undertaking an occupational based qualification within the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF), alongside 1 foster carer having completed their assessor

award. In addition 12 foster carers are completing single QCF units as part of their continual professional development, within the following subject areas: The Role of a Foster Carer, Understanding Attachment and Managing the Administration of Medication. The QCF qualifications provide foster carers with a professional qualification which evidences their competence within their care provision: meeting the child/young person's individual needs, developing their understanding of legislative frameworks and supporting partnership working.

2.4 In addition, to the courses detailed within the training programme, foster carers have accessed online courses, and Children Services training. There is a special event course in May 2014, for 'men who foster and caring for children who have been sexually abused – a male perspective', which is fully booked.

2.5 Plans for next year's training programme include developing the courses on behaviour management including sexualised behaviours, and 'bite size' courses on specific subject areas, i.e. use of secure email.

### **3 Social Work Training**

3.1 In 2013 -2014 a new government policy for delegating day to day authority for decision making by foster carers and residential managers was implemented. 2 successful familiarisation sessions for social workers were hosted by the Operations Managers for Looked after Children & Fostering to ensure the practice of delegation is embedded in social work practice. The Fostering Service and The Adoption Service also held 2 workshops for social workers, adoptive parents and foster carers on the theme of "moving children to permanence", which were enthusiastically received by their audience.

### **4. Placement Activity**

4.1 The Fostering Duty Team received 557 fostering referrals up to 31 March 2014. This is 60 more than for the same period 2013-2014. On 31 March 2014 there were 573 children in care with 473 of these in foster placements (313 in-house; 116 agency; 27 kinship placements, 4 parent and baby placements and 13 in supported lodgings). The number of children in foster care for the same period last year was 476. There has been an increase in referrals compared to the previous year but a drop in placements required. However this continues to place a considerable amount of pressure on the Fostering Service because, although the some of the placements were ultimately not needed, work has taken place in matching some of these children to foster carers.

4.2 The number of looked after children as of 31 March 2014 was 573. 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 and ESCC foster carers continue to offer homes to 18 young adults. In addition, 29 children are currently subject to special guardianship orders with East Sussex foster carers and fostering households also provide adoptive parents for 8 children, with one foster carer currently undergoing an assessment to adopt a child in placement.

4.3 Of the 557 referrals received between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, 356 resulted in placements being made. 137 were not needed due to other forms of support being successful and 64 are in the process of currently being matched.

4.4 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.

## **5. Health**

5.1 The Placement Support Service successfully bid for £1000 funding from the 'Lets Get Cooking' project to promote healthy eating and safe cooking to all looked after children in East Sussex. Staff and looked after children undertook several training sessions and the majority of the young people completed their individual cooking targets with each receiving £20 vouchers as a result of their efforts.

5.2 Looked after children were able to benefit from music and rhythm sessions provided by 'Rhythmix' a voluntary organisation set up to promote the therapeutic benefits of music to young people. Music tutors engaged very well in motivating our most challenging young people to take part in these sessions.

## **6. Placement Support**

6.1 The Placement Support Service is currently supporting 122 children, young people and their foster carers with tailored packages of support. In 2013–2014, 85 packages were reviewed with 20 pieces of work ending as 'aim achieved' and 26 new pieces of ongoing support to foster carers and children and life story work were commissioned. Holiday activities which ease the pressure on fostering households and in the main offer an educative and fun experience for looked after children were extremely successful. 39 activities offering 453 places were organised in 2013-2014. The feedback rated the activities of 86% of participants as 'excellent', 12% as 'good' and only 2% as 'fair' or 'poor'.

## **7. User Participation**

7.1 In September 2013, the second CICC ended and the third incoming CICC began. In total the outgoing and incoming CICC have met as a council 11 times during 2013-2014. 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. This year the CICC Action Day theme was, 'learn a new skill'. 67 looked after children attended the day and the feedback was that these events should continue and if possible be more often than once a year.

7.2 In addition, the CICC and other looked after children have been involved in 20 consultations some of which have been at a national level. Three on-line national surveys were completed: the Ofsted children's care monitor survey (which asked children to comment on their view of the 'state of children's care in England'), Health and the NHS (which looked at the health of looked after children), and looked after children's views on residential care. Participation in these surveys is usually very high; for example 97 looked after children completed the children's care monitor survey. East Sussex looked after children continue to influence the national agenda. Two young people from the Young Users Group who are now CICC members met with the Children's Minister, Edward Timpson, to consult on key issues affecting their lives as looked after children.

7.3 The Young Users Group continues to develop and is a springboard for young people who may show an interest in joining the CICC. The group comprises of 11 children aged from 7 to 11 who meet bi monthly to discuss care issues that concern them. They met 6 times during the year and on average 8 children attended each meeting. They have discussed topics such as 'What do I call my foster carers and what do I tell people at school about my home situation?' The group also completed questionnaires about life story work, and the frequency of contact and the quality of their relationship with their social workers. In general most were satisfied with their social workers.

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

8.1 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 4 residential events took place including one for Children Who Foster which attracted 26 children and 5 Fostering Service supervising social workers. This was an important move forward as Children Who Foster's contribution to fostering can be overlooked. The other three residential weekends were for looked after children aged 7 to 11, 11 to 16 and 15 to 18 year olds. As usual these events were oversubscribed. Staff from the Fostering Service and Looked after Children's Teams also took part in 3 fundraising events with the ESFCA. The East Sussex Foster

Carer's Charter which, as noted in last year's report, had been signed off by the Assistant Director, Children's Services and the Chair of the East Sussex Foster Care Association, is now in operation.

8.2 The Operations Manager of The Fostering Service 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 2013 – 2014, 3 foster carers attended the surgeries to discuss issues such as delaying the transfer of a child between teams at a critical time for that child, and a delay in starting life story work for a child. 2 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.

## **9. Fostering Allowances**

9.1 A complaint by a related (kinship) foster carer to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) led ESCC to concede, in line with a recent change in case law and national guidance, that the payment of the fee element of the foster carer allowance cannot be restricted to fully approved non-related foster carers. The LGO's judgement in this case asked the local authority:

- to produce clear guidelines for relevant staff explaining the criteria for paying fees on top of the basic maintenance allowances and ensure that these comply with national guidance.
- to include information about the criteria in all its policy documents, public information and leaflets provided to foster carers.
- to make it clear in these documents that the fee element is not restricted to non-related professional carers.
- to remind all relevant staff of the criteria, the policy, and the requirement not to discriminate between related and non-related foster carers.

9.2 A policy has now been approved by Lead Member and endorsed by the East Sussex Foster Carer Association. From the 1 April 2014 all non-related foster carers will receive the fee element and all foster carers will have to show a commitment to and completion of key pieces of training in order to retain that element of their allowances.

## **10. The Supported Lodgings Service**

10.1 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 31 households providing 50 placements to these young people. 6 new households were approved in 2013-2014 providing 8 placements and currently there are 5 assessments being carried out which should provide a further 7 new placements early in the new financial year. Between 2013 and 2014 the Service received 151 referrals for placements. 77 of these were for care leavers with 52 of them placed and 74 were for homeless young people of whom 44 were placed. A pilot scheme began in April 2013 with a newly approved 'Enhanced Supported Lodgings Provider' who has offered accommodation for our care leavers with the most complex and challenging needs. A further application to approve an 'enhanced provider' will be tabled at the May Fostering Panel. These carers will link in with our Adolescent Placement Scheme to ensure there is a joined up service for our older and more challenging looked after young people.

## **11. OFSTED**

11.1 The new Ofsted inspection framework for Safeguarding and Looked after Children has now been implemented and all settings inspections (with the exception of children's homes) are integrated into the new inspection framework for Looked after Children and Safeguarding. Unlike Adoption Services the Fostering Service will not receive an individual grading. However this report notes that the last two inspections of The Fostering Service graded it outstanding and following the Ofsted inspection of January 2014, the provision of permanence through adoption, special guardianship and long term fostering was graded as outstanding.

## **12. Summary**

12.1 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 2014-2015.

- To continue with the excellent achievement of recruiting foster carers in line with our ambitious THRIVE targets. THRIVE or alternative funding will need to continue for 2015-2016 to continue to sustain the high numbers of approval of a range of foster carers and supportive lodging providers for our care leavers or core funding will have to be redirected from elsewhere within the services.
- To continue revising policies, procedures and operational instructions including updating the foster carer's handbook. Changes this year include the new 2 tier assessment process for foster carer applicants, delegation of authority and changes to policy regarding the way the fee element of fostering allowances are paid.
- To continue to prioritise the provision of placement support in order to maintain placement stability, prevent disruptions and sustain adequate levels of user participation. There has been unprecedented demand in 2013-2014 for this service and the impact has been significant: placement stability of 3 or more moves as of 31 March 2014 as measured by National Indicator 61 was 8%, a full 3.2% below the national average where lower is better.
- 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 2014-2015.
- To continue to improve partnership working with locality social work, the family assessment service and LAC colleagues to limit the need for agency placements which have been reduced in 2013-2014.
- 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.

STEVE HUNT  
Operations Manager Fostering Service