

Agenda Item 10

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 27 July 2018
By: Director of Children's Services
Title of report: Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018
Purpose of report: To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between
1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report

1 Background information

- 1.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE

Director of Children's Services

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Local Members:

All

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018.

Background documentation:

None

Appendix 1 - The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service

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 which are addressed fully throughout the report. The core functions are as listed:

- Recruitment and retention
- Assessment
- Supervision and review
- Foster carer training
- The matching and placing of children and young people with foster carers and supported lodgings providers.

2. Recruitment and Retention of Carers

2.1 As in 2016-17, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) continues to be challenged by the number of foster carers it has been able to recruit. In common with last year, these challenges have been shared by neighbouring authorities. The 'National Stocktake' report, published at the end of this fiscal year, confirmed that there is a national shortage of foster carers.

2.2 Foster carers transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), continue to provide ESCC's Fostering Service with experienced carers, often also bringing income to the authority via their existing placements from other authorities. As with last year, some carers initially wishing to transfer from IFAs have at a later stage withdrawn, after being offered financial incentives by their agency to remain with them, for example the offer of private medical care.

2.3 Approval timescale targets for the assessment of foster carers continue to be important as they remain a significant incentive for carers choosing to foster for ESCC. Our assessment timescale of 6-8 months is below that of both our neighbouring authorities and many IFAs.

2.4 From 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018, 346 new enquiries were received which led to 157 screening calls and 86 initial visits to prospective foster carers. This year the Fostering Service has introduced a text enquiry service so that applicants can either text, phone, email, or complete a web form to enquire about the service. These methods maximise enquiries at weekends and out of office hours.

2.5 There were 6 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses held during 2017/18 and 43 households attended. During the assessment process, the Children in Care Council (CICC) continued to play an active role by holding 6 sets of informal interviews with applicants and providing feedback for the assessment report.

2.6 19 households offering 37 placements were approved in 2017/18 compared with 21 households offering 50 placements in 2016/17. 1 of these households was a transfer from an IFA and with an East Sussex child and a West Sussex placed. There were a further 12 assessments that were allocated for assessment and booked for presentation to the Fostering Panel that did not progress. The reasons were as follows:

- 4 cases were due to changes in personal circumstances that could not have been predicted earlier.
- 1 case was due to the applicant not being able to provide sufficient Stage 1 information and referees for us to evidence their address, employment and relationship history.
- 2 cases were assessments of family members who did not wish to be assessed and approved as foster carers.
- 5 cases were closed by the Fostering Service due to Stage 1 information that was not evident or available at earlier stages.

There were 13 fostering assessments still in progress at 31st March 2018 compared with 6 on the same date on 31st March 2017.

2.7 The retention of foster carers this year was a challenge for the service. Over recent years, it had been anticipated that the age profile of carers would lead eventually to a significant number of retirements within a short period. Accordingly 2017/18 saw 22 households retiring from the service, contributing to our overall figure of 30 households leaving ESCC. The context of these carers moving on, apart from retirement, included 6 changes in personal circumstances, one termination of approval, one transfer to an independent fostering agency, and sadly the death of 2 carers.

2.8 Considering these retention figures and the recruitment of 19 new households, the net loss of carers for ESCC Fostering Service was 4.3%. Although there are no recent national benchmarking figures for net gain/loss of carers (the last being 2015/16 putting the figure at 12%) we would consider ESCC's performance to be good.

2.9 Reports published over the last year both by 'Fostering Networks' and Sir Martin Narey's 'National Stocktake', would indicate that the recruitment of foster carers for local authorities has been particularly challenging.

2.10 The Fostering Service continues to employ the marketing strategy of 'continual presence'. This consists of wide-ranging and extensive advertising throughout the year using a range of different mediums. The Fostering Service marketing strategy for 2017/18 has focussed on its new strapline of '*foster with trust*'. This branding has been developed in partnership with the ESCC Communications team with the objective of promoting ESCC as the primary and most 'significant' Fostering Service within the geographical area. The Fostering Service is using foster carer profiles and 'real life' scenarios to illustrate the rewards of fostering. A significant strand of the strategy is the use of the internet; using social media, Facebook and Twitter to engage the e-generation.

Below are some examples of the mediums used to recruit foster carers:

- Information evenings promoted by advertising in the Herald, Hastings Observer, and Sussex Express running throughout the year
- Editorial in the Herald and Hastings Observer
- Roundabout advertising
- Your County
- Google 'ad words' (search engine marketing)
- Heart radio campaign
- Promotional merchandise 'giveaways' (Mugs, pens etc.)
- Banners across Eastbourne town centre and seafront
- Display board advertising (major routes into Eastbourne and Hastings)
- Magnet magazine
- Foster carer radio interviews
- ESCC intranet editorial
- Text communication and response to prospective applicants

3.0. The Fostering Panel

3.1 The Fostering Panel meet on a monthly basis. Panel activity included 19 new approvals, 23 initial annual foster care reviews and 2 standards of care reviews. Panel benefited from the appointment of 6 new members to its central list, including a new medical advisor and a newly elected ESCC Councillor. New panel members also bring experience from operational social work and residential children's services. Panel members received training commissioned from Coram BAAF which focused on assessments.

4.0. Recruitment Events

4.1 This year has seen a significant shift from recruitment events to the use of more internet and social media. 'Live' events such as information evenings and venue based promotions have been less popular. Potential applicants now use the internet to get a 'virtual' understanding of what an agency or service may potentially offer them. In response to this shift, the Fostering Service now produces a regular e-newsletter as well as regular 'Twitter' service updates.

Retention Events

- In May 2017, an evening event was held at Powder Mills to say "Thank You" to our foster carers. This was attended by 120 carers and staff.
- In August 2017, all foster carers and their families caring for East Sussex children were invited to a picnic at Knockhatch. Both children's social workers and supervising social workers attended. Agency foster carers were also invited to give them the opportunity to meet ESCC foster carers and staff, and to find out more about our service.
- In October 2017, the children of our foster carers were invited to a weekend at PGL Activity Centre. This was organised by the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) who worked in partnership with the Fostering Service to facilitate the event. Staff and managers attended to spend time with the children of our foster carers in order to further forge the relationship between carers and social workers.

5.0. Foster carer training

5.1 From 1st April 2017 to the 31st March 2018, 773 training places have been taken up by foster carers (as compared to last year's equivalent of 796), evidencing strong and continued interest in training. Overall, the evaluations of the courses by participants were rated as excellent, although there has been a reduction of evaluations being completed since the introduction of the East Sussex Learning Portal.

5.2 New courses introduced this year have included:

- Understanding the 'angry' child
- The impact of childhood experiences on mind, body and brain
- Family Thrive
- Supporting readiness to learn the key to education success
- Advanced attachment theory
- "Ladies who foster" support group
- Understanding sensory attachment

5.3 The Fostering Service has continued in 2017/18 to use the extensive skills, knowledge and expertise in delivering a number of our courses as well as the use of experienced trainers. These courses included:

- Parenting traumatised children
- Practical skills to help children protect themselves
- Understanding self-harm
- Caring for children with additional needs
- Using visuals to help communication
- Supporting new carers workshops
- Creative ideas for digital photo albums

5.4 These courses have received excellent feedback. Foster carers have identified the value of having experienced carers who really understand the fostering task delivering specific expertise

training. This model of delivery also provides a more cost effective way to up-skill those foster carers that need further training.

5.5 To ensure the quality of training, there is an agreed framework of requirements and support identified with opportunities for continual professional development. 11 foster carers are undertaking a variety of qualifications. These include the level 3 diploma 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualification, and Level 3 and 4 in 'Training and Education'. There are also 6 dedicated foster carers involved in the delivery and assessment of the 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualification.

5.6 Foster carer training has also been central in promoting the carer's vital role in preparing young people for independence. All carers are now familiar with the 'Passport for Independence' programme with it being driven and promoted by supervising and children's social workers.

Planned courses for 2018/19 include:

- Mental Health courses
- Understanding the teenage brain
- Gang culture
- County lines and cuckooing
- Neuroscience – Theory of attachment
- Montessori method up to 7 years of age
- Understanding the principals of non-violent resistance theory (NVR)
- Caring for the child with hidden disability (Developmental trauma)
- Loss and grief, the child's view

5.7 Other courses that Foster Carers / Supervising Social Workers (SSW's) are being trained to deliver are:

- An introduction to Non-violent resistance
- An introduction to Theraplay
- Understanding sensory attachment
- Understanding the angry child
- The impact of childhood experiences on mind, body and brain

To try and compensate for reductions in the training budget, identified training will be actively promoted to other agencies for income generation opportunities.

6. Foster carer support and supervision

6.1 East Sussex Fostering Service has experienced an unprecedented year of placement pressure with a significant number of households extending their approval preference to help respond to the demand. In turn, this has resulted in the need for increased support of foster carers by their SSWs. There is a recognised correlation between foster carers receiving good and appropriate support and the retention of these households.

6.2 As endorsed by the recent national 'Stocktake' report, peer support is a vital part of foster carer retention and The Fostering Service's 'Buddy' system has been utilised by an increasing number of foster carers during 2017/18.

6.3 Support groups continue to be a large part of the service's support strategy. There continue to be 4 localised groups in Uckfield, Rotherfield, Eastbourne and Newhaven. There are also three themed support groups: a parent and child foster carer's support group; a support group for carers of adolescents and a 'Men who Foster' support group. A new 'Ladies who Foster' support group has been developed which, similarly to the men's support group, discusses relevant themes

6.4 The Fostering Service has also developed a 'Pod system' for SSW's. This consists of 3 sub-teams of 4 SSW's overseen by senior social workers. This system has allowed carers to have

consistent support in the absence of their allocated SSW as fellow 'Pod' members will have a knowledge and understanding of each fostering household's circumstances. This system also allows for group supervision of SSWs and offers a further layer of support where SSWs can gain access to advice and direction more expediently.

6.5 Further support is provided for foster carers through the fostering advice line - an out of hour's service, available to all foster carers and supported lodgings providers for 365 days per year. This service is staffed by a team of 7 workers from the Fostering Service, working on a rota basis, to provide support and advice to all foster carers. The service deals with a range of issues such as placement disruptions children and young people missing from placement, police involvement or generally supports carers in managing challenging behaviours presented by our children or young people. The advice line has seen a considerable increase in activity in 2017/18 taking 378 calls in comparison with 2016/17's figure of 297.

6.6 There continues to be close working relationships with Looked After Children (LAC) teams, The Looked After Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (LACAMHS), The Virtual School and Placement Support Services (PSS); all of which are invaluable in supporting foster carers in sustaining placements and endeavouring to meet the children and young people's needs.

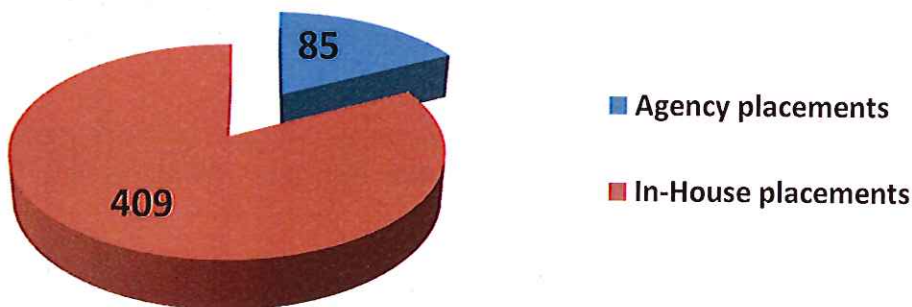
7. Health

7.1 Meeting the health needs of LAC remains a high priority for the Fostering Service. Foster carers continue to prioritise the health needs of their children with SSWs monitoring foster carers contribution to timely Initial Health Assessments. There have been a number of training courses available which can be accessed by foster carers to focus on the health needs of young people. These include: autism, self-harm, first aid and healthy living.

8. Placement activity

8.1 On 31st March 2018 there were 494 children in foster care. 409 of these children were placed with in-house placements as compared to 392 in the previous year. This includes in-house parent and child' placements, children subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with foster carers and those older young people remaining in their 'Staying Put' fostering placements through to independence. As a result of increased LAC numbers, the number of East Sussex LAC placed with agency foster carers has increased from 64 children in 2016/17 to 85 at the end of March 2018 reflecting increased numbers of children placed both with our in house foster carers as well as with agency foster carers. The Fostering Duty team will source and match all IFA carers with our children.

Placement Activity 2017/18



8.2 As of 31st March 2018, 19 young people (over 18 years of age) remain with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements. There are also 26 children who are currently subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with East Sussex foster carers.

8.3 Of the 534 referrals received between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, 437 resulted in placements being made or matched. Of the 534 referrals, 97 were ultimately not required. On 31st March 2018 there were an additional 36 active referrals waiting to be matched with foster carers.

9. The Supported Lodgings Team

9.1 East Sussex Supported Lodgings provision continues to be an invaluable resource for LAC, care leavers and homeless young people. 2017/18 saw the Supported Lodgings service benefit from Corporate Transformation funding for the Housing and Accommodation project to extend housing options for care leavers and homeless young people. As a result of this funding, the service has reviewed its recruitment strategy to focus on maximising the potential of all applicants applying to the service, encouraging people with a wide range of skills and experiences.

9.2 A new marketing strategy has been launched to recruit additional Supported Lodgings providers using a wider range of media formats, with plans to promote the service still further via social media. The website has been updated, including a new direct text service and the assessment process has been streamlined to reduce timescales whilst remaining sufficiently robust. Applications to date range from 'landlords' wanting to help a young person, to experienced carers who are looking for approval as a jointly registered foster carer/supported lodgings providers (hybrids).

9.3 Since June 2017 to end of March 2018, 61 Care Leavers (85%) and 11 16/17 year old homeless young people (15%) have been placed with Supported Lodgings providers. Through this project, providers have been encouraged to extend their approval potential to take more parent and child and more Emergency Duty placements. Focused support and training is being developed to help providers offer statutory placements to young people with more complex needs, thereby expanding local support and pathway options.

9.4 During this year, Supported Lodgings providers have demonstrated that, when appropriately matched, they can support young people 'stepping down' from expensive agency foster and residential settings. During 2017/18 2 young people moved from agency placements to Supported Lodgings carers making a saving of £212K.

9.5 As of 31st March 2018 there were 38 Supported Lodgings households providing a total of 62 placements across the county. In the year 2017/18 there has been 9 new approvals, providing 12 additional beds. Recruitment of sufficient Supported Lodgings remains challenging because of the competitive nature of the local market. The revised marketing strategy allows the service to attract applicants who may have previously considered taking overseas and local students, households where their own children have recently left home (empty nesters), single carers and foster carers wishing to transition to Supported Lodgings instead of retiring.

9.6 Between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, the Supported Lodgings team received 62 referrals requesting placements for young people. 30 of which were LAC, 31 were for homeless young people and 1 was unknown (out of county referral, no status given.) Of the 62 referrals, 27 were closed, 3 remain open (requiring placement) and 32 were placed.

10. User participation

10.1 The Children in Care Council (CICC) continues to go from strength to strength. CICC members have participated in 89 opportunities to promote their work both locally and nationally and some examples are listed below-

- Meeting with the Children's Commissioner.
- Participating in foster carer preparation groups and advising recruitment panels for prospective foster carers.
- Attended a meeting with Minister of State, Robert Goodwill.

- Attended activity holidays representing CICC.
- Highlight issues and concerns made by looked after children.
- Promoted the need for more cyber safety and recognition of mental health issues for LAC.
- Published regular newsletter.
- Attended the national CICC Conference in Oxford.
- Taken part in work experience within Children's Services.
- Partnership working with the Through Care team.

11. Working in Partnership with East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA)

11.1 The Operations Manager attends the monthly evening meetings of the ESFCA management group to report on the developments of the Fostering Service and on Children's Services more generally. During 2017/18 the service has worked closely with the now established chair and trustees of the ESFCA. Consultation has taken place on a number of issues including young people's savings and foster carer allowances. They continue to provide support to foster carers who have raised concerns at the surgeries held in conjunction with both the Fostering and LAC Operational Managers.

12. The Placement Support Service (PSS)

12.1 The PSS is currently supporting 91 young people. 74 reviews of packages of support were held throughout the year. During 2017-2018, 30 new pieces of ongoing work were commissioned including 6 pieces of life story work. The PSS also responded to 91 emergency or crisis requests from carers that resulted in 121 days support. PSS staff provide additional support to young people who are unable to sustain their school placements. Obviously a child not being in school creates additional pressures on foster carers. This additional direct work is funded by the Virtual School.

12.2 Despite some financial pressures and staffing capacity, the PSS has continued to provide holiday and weekend group activities for LAC aged 5 to 17. All activities cover all aspects of the national curriculum. The partnership with Bedes School continues to allow our young people to access sports facilities including the swimming pool free of charge at weekends. PSS has also been able to negotiate free tickets to Brighton and Hove Albion football matches.

During the year:

- 40 group holiday activities were provided
- PSS worked with 127 young people
- 458 holiday places were offered to children and young people
- 10 to 15 young people on average attend each activity

98% of young people who evaluated their activities rated them as either excellent or good. Foster carers highly value PSS support and holiday activities as illustrated by the comments below extracted from the service's annual evaluations.

'Without PSS I could not have offered the young person a placement for the 7 weeks she was here.'

'As a new carer I have found PSS to be invaluable in supporting our children'.

'Having support allows me to have time with my own family and I know the children are in safe hands'.

13. Summary

13.1 The most significant challenge for the Fostering Service during 2017/18 continues to be the recruitment of sufficient foster carers and this is reflected both nationally and by our

neighbouring authorities. The recent 'National Stocktake' report by Sir Martin Narey evidenced that although we are seeing an increasing LAC population nationally, the number of people coming forward to be foster carers is not increasing. In East Sussex, although we have experienced better than average retention figures, these are negated to some extent by fewer numbers of carers recruited. However, despite this challenge, our numbers of in-house placements have increased significantly. This is partly attributable to the fact that there is poor availability of appropriate agency carers, leaving no option but to place with our in-house foster carers. It is crucial that placement is combined with increased support to our foster carers and robust risk assessments. The revision of our recruitment strategy for both Fostering and Supported Lodgings now focuses around the internet and social media. Early indications for 2018/19 would suggest that this change in strategy is showing positive signs, with the first quarter showing the highest number of approvals of new foster carers for the last 5 years.

13.2 Towards the end of 2017/18, an analysis regarding the drop in the number of foster carers transferring from IFAs to ESCC was undertaken. Traditionally, this had been a fairly fertile ground for recruitment. However, more recently the number of enquiries from carers wishing to transfer has reduced. Further investigations have revealed that carers who had expressed an interest in transferring have withdrawn due to financial incentives offered by the agencies. A recent comparison undertaken by ESFCA and The Fostering Service with our local authority neighbours showed ESCC allowances are less competitive. As the driver for agency carers wishing to transfer to local authority is based on local authority having more choice and placement availability it is essential that ESCC remains competitive when carers are considering transferring. The Fostering Service is now in the process of proposing a modest inflation uplift to foster care payments for 2018/19. This, coupled with the services excellent reputation for support and training, will hopefully attract more carers wishing to transfer from independent fostering agencies.

The Key Management Priorities for 2018/2019 include:

- Investment in Supported Lodgings via the Corporate Transformation funding to continue through 2018/19 to maximise the accommodation resources for young people who are homeless and leaving care.
- Recruitment and retention of foster carers. Positive partnership working between the service and corporate communications team in reviewing recruitment strategies should help to improve the potential numbers of carers being recruited.
- Improved preparation of young people for independence. The 'Passport to Independence' programme will continue to be a major priority for LAC services with foster carers taking a key role in the delivery of this programme.

Adrian Sewell
Operation Manager Fostering Service

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