

Appendix 2

Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015

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.

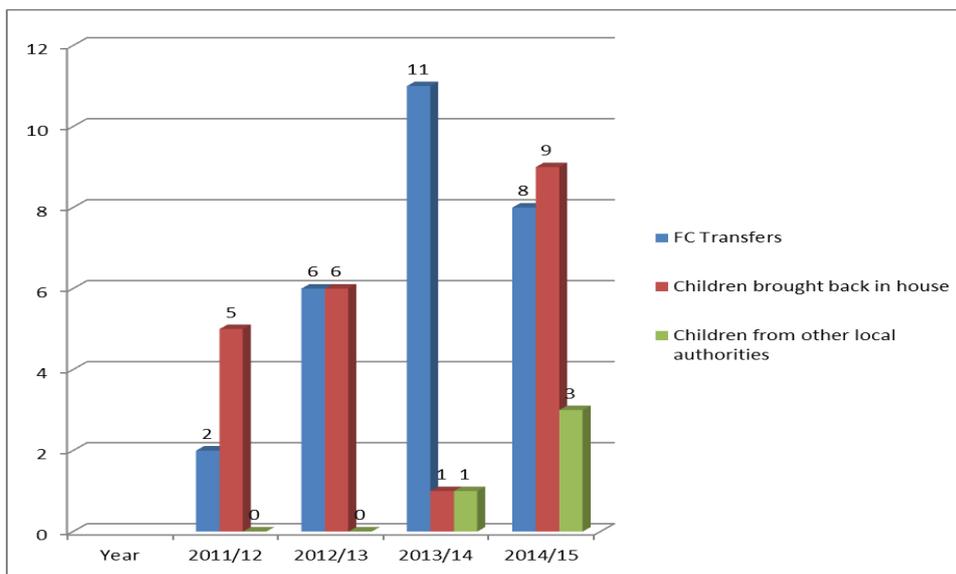
2.0 Recruitment and Retention of Carers

2.1 The recruitment and retention team have been effective in undertaking timely assessments so that the process for applicants to foster 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 for foster carers approved with independent fostering providers. The team has also reviewed and amended their processes and recording systems to ensure they are effective, informative and timely.

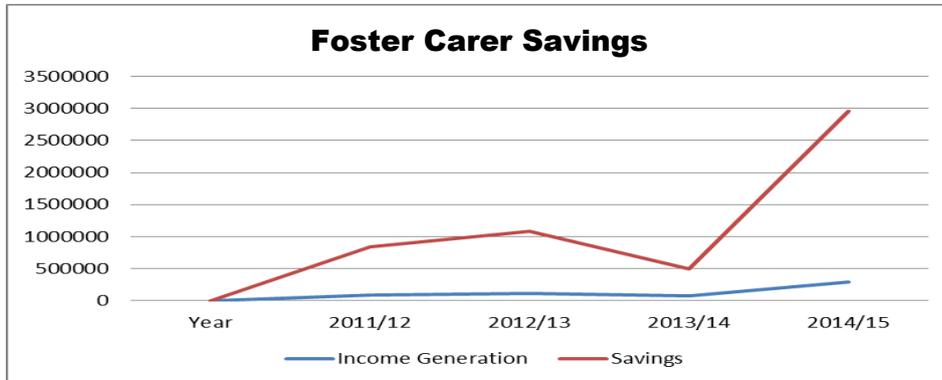
2.2 From 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015, 451 new enquiries were received which led to 205 screening calls and 77 initial visits to prospective foster carers. The recruitment strategy has focused on the recruitment of foster carers for children and young people of all ages but more recently the focus has been refined to the recruitment of foster carers for teenagers and also for children with disabilities, since both of these subsets of children can be particularly hard to place. .

2.3 During this period the service has facilitated 8 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses. 42 households have attended these courses. The Children in Care Council (CICC), children who foster, and experienced foster carers help to facilitate these preparation groups and this continues to work extremely well.

2.4 The number of foster carer approvals concluded in 2014–2015 was 41 households that offer 62 placements. 8 of these households were transfers from independent fostering providers with 9 East Sussex looked after children already placed with these families. 3 looked after children from other local authorities were also placed with our foster carers which has brought some income into the service. (See table below).

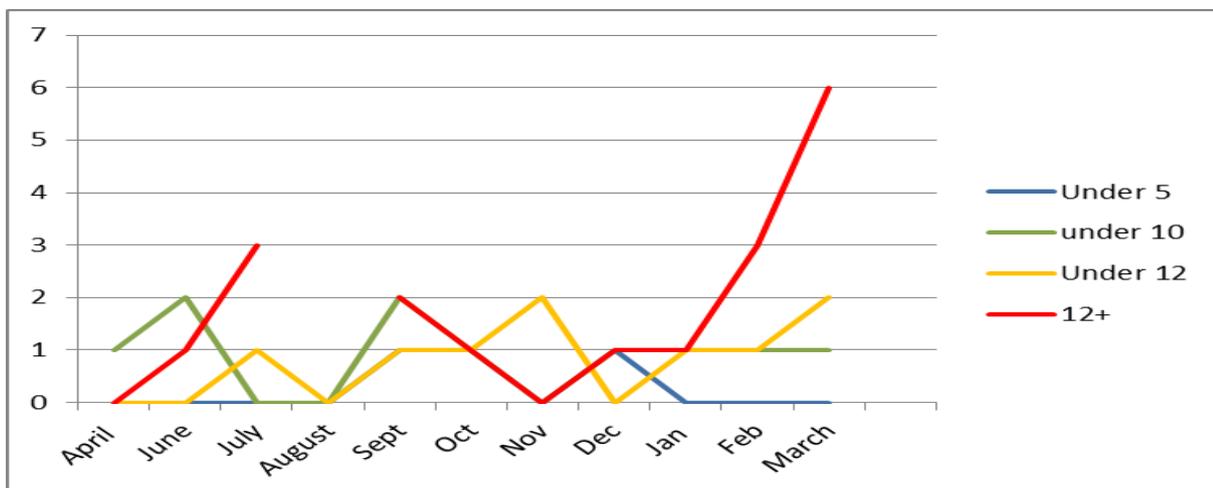


2.5 The recruitment and retention team have worked closely with the Looked After Children's (LAC) teams to advise and support social workers in their discussions with those agency foster carers who have enquired about transferring to East Sussex Fostering Service. The team have streamlined their processes so that transfer assessments are completed in a timely manner. After the deduction of the East Sussex foster carer allowances paid to these foster carers the transfer of these foster carers equate to a saving to East Sussex of £256,000 per year in agency fees. (See diagram below).



2.6 Fostering Network's most recent survey states that 12% of foster carers are lost nationally every year. The success of the East Sussex Fostering Service's retention rate is significantly better than the national average and has improved greatly from last year. The service only lost 2.3% of their foster carers during 2014-2015 compared with 6.6% in the previous year.

2.7 The diagram below illustrates the total number of carers recruited each month and their preferred age ranges. (See diagram below)



2.8 East Sussex Fostering Service has been very successful in the recruitment of foster carers for younger children, with a sharp rise in the approval of carers for older children and teenagers towards the end of the year. This is evidence of the impact of the change of emphasis in the service's targeted recruitment strategy to meet the need for foster carers for older children. It is the Fostering Service's intention to continue in this direction for 2015/16 in order to meet the demand of placements for this more challenging cohort.

2.9 There were 7 fostering assessments still in progress at 31 March 2015. The recruitment and retention team are also following up enquiries from a further 5 fostering households currently approved by independent fostering agencies who are expressing an interest in transferring to East Sussex County Council.

2.10 During 2014–2015 the service delivered a number of recruitment and retention events and these have included:

Recruitment Events

- Information evenings have been held monthly - 6 in Eastbourne, 5 in Hastings and 1 in Uckfield (joint event with Adoption) The service was represented at the annual Summer Fayre at Raystede animal shelter and also spent time in Eastbourne town centre, handing out leaflets and postcards to increase the profile of fostering for East Sussex County Council.

Retention Events.

- In April 2014, an event was held at Knockhatch for birth children of families who foster.
- In June 2014, a picnic was held at The British Science Centre, Herstmonceux for carers, children and staff.
- In August 2014, an event was held at Knockhatch for carers, children and staff. The Fostering Service invited agency foster carers caring for ESCC children and their social workers. This has proven to be successful in raising our profile with agency carers.
- In September 2014, an evening event was held at Blackstock Barn, Hellingly, to say 'Thank You' to our carers. This was attended by 120 carers and staff.
- Skills to Foster sessions for 'children who foster' was offered to all newly approved carer's children aged 7 – 17 years in September 2014.
- In October 2014, The Fostering Service in conjunction with East Sussex Foster Carer Association (ESFCA), held a 'children who foster' residential trip at PGL, Windmill Hill in celebration of Sons & Daughters week. The children produced a Christmas card which was sent to all foster families, agency carers caring for ESCC children, and social work teams.
- The Fostering Service has sent regular newsletters to foster carers providing up to date information on the service and to promote the service's support groups and training events.

Advertising and Media Coverage



- This year The Fostering Service has focussed their recruitment strategy on the 'Reward worth waiting for'. This theme has been used in advertising for mainstream fostering as well as incorporating it into targeted recruitment of carers for teenagers and children with disabilities. Advertisements and articles have been used in the following:

- Bus shelters
- Local buses
- Sovereign FM Radio, Arrow FM Radio and Heart FM
- Local papers
- Lamp post banners
- 'Display vans' in both Hastings and Eastbourne
- posters in Eastbourne Arndale Centre
- 'Your County' magazine



- The Fostering Service has produced new posters and postcards for general fostering and specifically for children with disabilities. These have been distributed to all foster carers to display and distribute in their local area. This has widened the net of recruitment advertising throughout the county.

3 Foster Care Training

3.1 From 1st September 2014 to the 31st March 2015, 554 training places have been taken up by foster carers (last year's equivalent was 422), predicting an increase for the overall academic year. Evaluation of the courses by participants show 79 % to be rated as "excellent" and 17% as "good".

3.2 Increasingly the Fostering Service is providing additional resources including e-learning and signposting carers to internet sites. All foster carers have been provided with a Paediatric First Aid books and have the opportunity to obtain the latest Fostering Network 'Safer Caring' manual and 'A New Approach and Safer Care in the Digital World' by attending the relevant courses.

3.3 New courses introduced this year have included;

- Food for Thought, Promoting Positive Behaviours
- Resilience Youth Work in Practice, Staying Put 18 – 25
- Talking to Young People about Sexual Health
- The Secure Base Model
- Therapeutic Life Story with Traumatised Children,
- Transitions and Endings
- Using Storytelling and Sand trays as Therapeutic Tools

3.4 The development of the Digital Mentors has been successful, with 3 foster carers being trained as Children Exploitation Online Protection (CEOP) ambassadors. These ambassadors provide training and 1:1 support to other foster carers on internet safety and technology use. The Fostering Service is currently planning a number of new workshops on the safe use of technology, including iPads, mobile phones and the potential risks of sexual exploitation on such devices.

3.5 The Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) qualifications / accredited units continue, with 12 foster carers currently completing their Level 3 Children and Young People Diploma and 2 undertaking their Assessors award. As more foster carers are becoming involved within the training delivery and in co-facilitating discussion groups, the service is also introducing a level 3 Education and Learning qualification.

4. Foster carer support and supervision

4.1 The Fostering Service currently has 296 Fostering households. Of these, 27 households provide a range of placements for children with disabilities. Supervision and contact plans are assessed on the need of the foster carers, their family and the complexity of the children placed.

4.2 Support Groups are available to provide foster carers with opportunities to meet with other carers, to increase support networks and to give the opportunity for shared learning. There are four localised groups in Uckfield, Rotherfield, Eastbourne and Newhaven. There are also four themed groups: black and minority ethnic children and young people's support group, parent and child foster carers support group, a support group for carers of adolescents and a 'men who foster' support group.

4.3 Further support is provided for foster carers through the Fostering Advice line - an out of hours advice line 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.

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

6. Health

6.1 Meeting the health needs of looked after children remains a priority of the Fostering Service. In 2014/15 the service has run a number of training courses around health issues including suitable diets for looked after children, updated practice/health issues for babies, child development, dental health, food hygiene, medication training, sexual health and autism.

6.2 The system for notification of children to receive their initial health assessment has been recently streamlined by the Fostering Duty team. This will help to improve performance in timescales for 2015-16.

6.3 As part of an integrated LAC medical service, the Fostering Service now benefits from the services of an allocated medical adviser who provides medical oversight for fostering applications and foster carers' reviews when there are complex health issues.

7. Placement Activity

7.1 On 31st March 2015 there were 548 children in care with 433 of these in foster placements (292 in-house; 94 agency; and 34 in approved kinship placements). Compared with the previous year, this shows that agency foster placements have decreased by 19%.

7.2 In addition, 14 young people (over 18) remain with their foster carers under the 'Staying Put' arrangements. There are also 33 children who are currently subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with East Sussex foster carers. Fostering households also provide adoptive parents for 9 children, with one further foster carer currently undergoing an assessment to adopt a child in placement. Clearly this level of stability is very positive for individual children but it does impact on the number of placements available.

7.3 Of the 536 referrals received between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, 505 resulted in placements being made or matched. Of the 536 referrals, 83 were ultimately not required and 20 remain awaiting placement (a combination of respite and short-term placements). In order to prioritise need, the Fostering Duty team have also developed a new referral form that incorporates a 'traffic light' system which highlights the urgency of placement need and confirms senior management authorisation.

7.4 The Fostering Duty team continues to focus on placing children within East Sussex resources. Since September 2014 only 2 children have been placed in external agency placements. These children were 2 young males who required specialist placements for extremely sexualised behaviour.

7.5 As a result of a LAC audit in July 2014, 18 children in agency provision were identified as having needs which could be met equally as well in-house. Of those 18 children, Fostering Duty brought 12 back into in-house provision with a saving of £630k for 2014-2015.

7.6 The matching process continues to be important. The ongoing challenge is that if we match complex children with newly approved foster carers, an extensive support packages needs to be put in place; so that foster carers are adequately supported to deal with some of our most challenging looked after children.

8. Placement Support

8.1 The Placement Support service (PSS) is currently working with 116 children, young people and their foster carers with tailored packages of support. In 2014–2015, 28 new pieces of ongoing support to foster carers and children were commissioned including life story work. 75 packages of support were reviewed with 15 pieces of work ending as 'aim achieved'.

8.2 The PSS remains a vital resource, not only in providing ongoing support packages to long term placements but also in preventing a move to more costly agency placements. The following feedback from service users clearly indicates the benefits of this support:

- "If I don't have placement support, I can't keep this young man".
- "He is like a different boy since he completed life story work; he used to feel responsible, now he is just able to get on with his life, Thank you".
- "It is good to meet up with others that are in care, just like me, as they understand me"

8.3 The PSS has recently developed a positive partnership with Bede's School who are now providing a range of activities to looked after children at nil cost. Closer links to the Virtual School for looked after children have been developed. Four placement support staff are providing additional support to individual children in schools where there is a significant risk of their education placement breaking down. The service continues to promote close links with the Looked After Children Mental Health Service by attending their monthly referral meeting and working with the "team around the child".

9. User Participation

9.1 During 2014-2015, the PSS took the lead in encouraging ESCC LAC and the LAC teams to complete the national children's on line monitor (organised by the Children's Commissioner) where 60 looked after children from East Sussex County Council completed detailed surveys. These results are currently being analysed and will feed into the overall children's "You Said, We did" framework.

9.2 The Young User Group (YUG) continues to be a springboard for young people who may show an interest in joining a future Children In Care Council (CICC). The group comprises 8 children aged from 7 to 11 who meet bi monthly to discuss care issues that concern them. This group met 6 times during the year and on average 8 children attended each meeting. The children have redesigned their logo that is displayed on their new T shirts and they are actively involved in the CICC Action Day. The YUG have now developed closer links with the CICC by periodically attending each other's meetings.

9.3 The third CICC has been running since September 2013 and during 2014-2015 they have met 12 times. CICC members have attended leadership training courses and the majority are also completing their Bronze Arts Award.

9.4 In 2014 the Action Day theme was 'safety' and 67 looked after children attended. The feedback was that these events should continue.

9.5 During 2014-2015, CICC members have attended

- 39 holiday activities to promote their Speak up Sessions (SUSS IT) and dealt with 29 issues raised by looked after children.

- 28 consultations locally and nationally that include meetings with the new Children's Commissioner, the Children's Minister, the local Member of Parliament, local County Councillors and members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 9 sessions for the Skills to Foster preparation groups. This allows prospective carers to directly hear the voice of the child in care.
- 9 recruitment panels for social workers.
- 5 meetings with CICC's from Brighton and Hove and West Sussex to promote closer regional working

9.6 The PSS regularly seeks views from looked after children in order to improve practice. Some of "You Said, We Did" responses were as follows:

- *LAC wanted simple explanations with regard to their rights and entitlements-*
The CICC funded and produced a pack of playing cards with simple explanations on their rights.
- *LAC found it difficult to access the Complaints webpage-*
A new web page has now being redesigned that CICC will test. The CICC logo will be added to it when it is approved.
- *LAC did not know always who their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was-*
On Takeover day the CICC worked with IRO's to produce an IRO photo board so young people could easily recognise their IRO.
- *The CICC wanted to make more links with LAC with disabilities-*
A meeting has set up at with children living at The Bungalow with an aim to develop links with children with disabilities.

10. Partnership work with foster carers

10.1 The Operations Manager of the Fostering Service continues to attend the monthly meetings of the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) management group to report on developments in the Fostering Service and Children's Services.

10.2 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.

11. The Supported Lodgings Service

11.1 Supported lodgings providers continue to offer valuable placements for LAC, care leavers and homeless young people in the East Sussex area.

11.2 There are currently 29 households providing a total of 43 placements across the county. Since April 2014, 10 supported lodgings assessments have been undertaken with 3 being approved and a further 7 assessments awaiting approval.

11.3 An objective over this past year has been to encourage supported lodging providers to consider becoming registered foster carers, therefore 'enhancing' their potential to provide placements for younger people across both services. This has been successful with 4 carer's now holding dual registration and able to provide care placements for our older and more complex and challenging looked after children.

11.4 During the last year Supported Lodgings carers have provided a number of step down placements for children from both in-house residential and foster placements. Significantly, Supported Lodgings carers provided 4 placements for looked after young people moving from expensive external residential provision at a saving of £800,000 per annum.

12 Summary

12.1 The Fostering Service has recruited 41 foster carer households offering 62 placements. This success is due to ESCC Fostering Service not only having an effective marketing and recruitment strategy, but also due to having a firmly established reputation for the effective and professional support it offers its foster carers. ESCC needs to ensure that this reputation is not compromised in order for the service to continue its recruitment success. This will avoid the need to place looked after children in further expensive agency placements in the long term.

12.2 The demand on the Fostering Duty team has been considerable in the past year with most referrals resulting in in-house and good quality placements. The Duty team has worked closely with supervising social workers to maximise foster carers' potential to take a range of placements.

12.3 As a result of a comprehensive management placement audit in July 2014, the Fostering Duty team led on a task to bring a number of children back into suitably matched in house ESCC foster placements. This has resulted in savings of £800,000. The successful placement of these young people has been achieved because of the excellent partnership with existing LAC partners, including The Placement Support service, The Virtual School and the Supported Lodgings service. All of these have provided a comprehensive range of extensive support services to help manage our most challenging and complex young people.

12.4 The key management priorities for 2015-2016 include:

- A Targeted recruitment strategy to attract prospective foster carers for older more complex children. The challenge that this brings is that it places East Sussex Fostering Service's marketing strategy in direct competition with independent fostering agencies that have traditionally focussed on this age range.
- To continue with the Fostering Service's success in attracting foster carers who wish to transfer to East Sussex County Council. Whilst children and foster carers benefit from being registered and integrated with good quality services for looked after children within East Sussex County Council, this will continue to make significant financial savings for the Council.

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