

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4 APRIL 2016

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD 1 OCTOBER TO 31ST DECEMBER 2015

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. To note the report and the activity of the Fostering Agency.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Overview and Scrutiny receives quarterly reports from the Fostering Agency.

Background

3. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Agency. It undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering. This report is from the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Agency.
4. Under the National Minimum Standards (NMS), (25.7) all Fostering agencies are required to provide a half year report to the Executive¹ regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Agency and Fostering Panel. This report provides an update on recent developments and challenges within the Fostering Service for the period 1st October – 31st December 2015.

Performance

5. As of Sept 30th 2015 there were 481 children in our care.
 6. This is a year on year increase of 18 children for the same period in 2013 and 2014 (children in care numbers of 463 in both years).
 7. The Fostering Service has 190 mainstream and connected carers approved (some connected carers are temporarily approved as set out later in this report for breakdown).
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8. In this period there were 173 children placed with in-house mainstream, and 85 children placed with kinship carers.
9. 111 children were placed in Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFA's). In house placements are currently full to capacity; all carers require monthly supervision, whereby each child is discussed in detail by the Fostering Supervising Social Workers to ensure that the foster carer is supported to meet that child's needs. Where a child is placed in an IFA placement, this work is carried out by the IFA's own social workers.
10. In this period 5 young people were living in Leicestershire's two residential homes.
11. In this period 41 children were living in independent children's homes.
12. In this period 22 young people aged 16+ were living in supported lodgings.
13. In this period 23 children were in adoption placements.
14. In this period 18 young people were placed with parents.
15. In this period 9 young people were placed under Staying Put arrangements.
16. A planned formal restructure of the Fostering Service was implemented in April 2015 and enabled the services to respond more flexibly to recruitment and to targets to meet increase in-house provision to meet the expected increased number of children and young people who need to be in local authority care.
17. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering (2011) give a six month time scale for a fostering assessment to be completed from application to presentation at panel. In the period April 1st to September 30th 2015, 10 mainstream assessments were undertaken and all were completed within the 6 month time scale; 3 assessments with applicants who have either been counselled out due to new information coming to light or left for personal reasons; 2 private fostering assessments and 2 change of circumstance assessments for current carers who have had a change in their personal situation; commenced 2 assessments who withdrew within the first few weeks of the process.
18. In the same period, there were 22 new 'connected carer' placements and 6 panel approvals.
19. In 2014 two independent assessors were commissioned to meet statutory deadlines and the ongoing sufficiency needs of the service in relation to increasing foster carer provision. Since then Leicestershire County Council social workers have been trained and are used to undertake assessment on a peripatetic basis.

Foster Carer Recruitment

21. Our recruitment strategy for new fostering households continues in earnest and we are currently on target to recruit 12 new households (net). We are likely to lose 15 households. 13 to retirement from fostering, and 2 deregistered due to concerns on the level of care offered.

Foster Carer and Fostering Profile

22. In February 2015 a Business Analyst worked with the Fostering Service to bring together a range of information to better understand the profile of placements and foster carers. The key findings from these reports are listed below:
 - i. The majority of foster carers work at skill level 3;
 - ii. A third of foster carers are aged 61 and over;
 - iii. A third of foster carers are either above the default retirement age or within five years of this, however a third of foster carers are more than 15 years from the default retirement age;
 - iv. The majority of LAC placements are male (57%) against female (43%);
 - v. A fifth of LAC are within 2 years of turning 18;
 - vi. The majority of LAC placements (85%) are from one ethnicity of "White/British";
 - vii. Almost three quarters of external commission placements are classified as "agency fostering" (73%) ;
 - viii. The majority placements (70%) are made with a group of eight suppliers and the majority of spend (80%) are made with a group of eighteen suppliers;
 - ix. Contract management has increased by 255% from 38 placements to 135 placements within four years with a value of £8.7m in 2014.
23. Over the summer of 2015 a consultation and development company called iMPower worked with the Fostering Service to better understand the priority commissioning areas. The following is a summary of their findings and 'outputs':
 - i. The analysis identified an imperative and opportunity to arrest the decline in in-house fostering capacity, increase placement share and achieve better use of resources
 - ii. Doing so will require an investment in the service, and a concerted and coordinated
 - iii. effort to deliver focussed changes
 - iv. With the support of the LCC team and foster carers, agreement was been achieved on the priority development areas and detailed plans have been drawn up, including resource inputs
24. The reforms proposed are centred on the needs of carers and those who may become carers. The diagram below provides an overview of the findings:

Carer engagement – headline findings (see full report for more details)



Connected Persons

25. Family and Friends foster care is a formal arrangement where the child is looked after by the Local Authority and placed with a relative, friend or connected person. 'Relative of Friend' is defined as a: grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or by marriage), step-parent, or friend of the child.
26. A 'Connected Person' is anyone who has a pre-existing connection to a child through their extended network. This may be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a child-minder, a teacher, a youth worker, although these are not exclusive categories (National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations 2013).
27. This case law led to an increase in the formality of assessment of a large group of carers in Leicestershire and subsequent directives from the family courts to complete assessments in shrinking timescales has had a significant impact on assessment and supervisory capacity in the Fostering Service.
28. To address this capacity issue, a dedicated 'Connected Persons' unit called the Kinship Team was created and sits within the Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This team aims to provide a more focused service in a more timely and consistent manner.
29. Issues relating to Leicestershire family court expectations regarding completion of assessments in shrinking timescales will be raised at the Family Justice Board.

Emotional Permanence

30. Special Guardianship was introduced as a new permanence option for children in December 2005. It provides a legally secure foundation for building a permanent relationship between the child and their special guardian, while preserving the legal link between the child and their birth family.
31. 'Choices for children and Young People' is Leicestershire's placement 'and sufficiency strategy for children and young people in care (2013-2015) and is supplemented/updated by the Market position statement for 2015-16. This strategy sets out Leicestershire County Council's ambition to secure emotional attachment, physical stability and long term commitment for the children and young people that come into our care. Central to this vision is exploring all options to keep children and young people within their family networks through support arrangements and formal care proceedings where order options include Special Guardianship or Residence Orders. We continue to explore this as a possibility in all cases, and can find creative ways to support this move into permanence for our looked after children. However, a financial risk analysis of the growing cohort of special guardians is required in order to understand the future draw on the authority's limited resources.

Development and Training

32. Staff development and their engagement in the development of fostering services is a key priority and will help to deliver improved outcomes for children. In order to ensure the Fostering Service is working consistently with the Locality Teams the Growing Safety methodology is undertaken in all of the work we do.
33. The Head of Service and Service Manager have scheduled an audit of foster carer supervision records to determine the baseline of use of Signs of Safety by the supervising social workers. The outcome of the audit will be to determine what developmental activity/training is needed to ensure Signs of Safety is used meaningfully to inform the support and training needs of foster carers to best meet the outcomes of children and young people in care. The actions arising from this audit and other activity e.g. foster carer feedback will be used to update the Personal Training and Developmental Plan for 2016-17. This work is led by the Fostering Adoption and Placement's Training Coordinator who was introduced to the service as part of the remodelling in April 2015.
34. The foster carers, kinship and short breaks Personal Training and Developmental Plan was recently updated and can be found online at: <http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2016/1/19/FOSTER%20CARER%20TRAINING.pdf>
35. There continues to be support to the Placement Commissioning unit within FAP from the Commissioning Support Team, with a renewed focus on commissioning planning for cohorts of children e.g. 16+ young people,

contract management and use of contract and contract management specialists to inform practice.

36. There is also a Transition Plan to support the implementation of the Regional Framework that includes the publishing of the 'Plan on a Page' guidance (see below) and the use of floorwalkers to support the brokers' use of the Framework.

Proposal On A Page: **Regional Framework** | v1.0_20160211

<p>Ambition: To implement the East Midlands Regional framework and enable Leicestershire County Council to source agency placements within procurement regulations</p>	<p>Proposal Description:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The East Midlands Regional Framework has been running for the past four years with five local authorities, Leicestershire County Council joined the framework this year and now is a partner with the eight East Midland local authorities All placements that require agency provision will be sourced from the East Midlands Regional Framework, where Leicestershire will follow a process of mini competition to achieve the best match for our children and young people and a cost effective price Where placements are identified as matching the outcomes, and where a shortlist of more than one provider is available, the decision on which placement within the shortlist will be with the child's Social Worker Where a placement match cannot be identified within the East Midlands Regional Framework, the Family Placement Commissioning Team will identify a match "off frame work" and undertake a direct award on behalf of the child's Social Worker
<p>Key Proposal Outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency placements are sourced on the framework Where more than one match is identified, child Social Worker to decide within shortlisted match provision Direct Awards are only made if no suitable provision is available within the framework Matched framework provision cannot be refused as direct awards are only to be used as an exception 	
<p>Role & Functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placement Commissioning Team to source provision within the Framework based on placement outcomes Child's Social Worker to identify preference where more than two shortlisted provisions are available Mini Competitions and Direct Awards to be reviewed monthly by Placement Commissioning Team Manager 	
<p>Strategic Alignment & Interdependencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Commissioning strategy Partnership with Regional Framework local authorities 	
<p>Strategic Governance: <i>Stakeholders:</i> Nicci Collins, Andrew Logie, Liz Perfect, Chris Nerini, Sarah Wilson, Maria Hunt <i>Proposal Sponsor:</i> Walter McCulloch, Neil Hanney</p>	
	<p>Benefits to be achieved are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance with procurement rules and regulations Improved outcomes for our looked after children and young people Improved matched provision within agency placements Improved value for money with agencies Improved supplier management Improved recording and reporting of agency placements and needs of our looked after children Greater market management and greater placement choice in time

Development of the Service

37. Priorities for the last quarter have included:

- The implementation of the new structure
- Recruitment to vacancies following the restructure
- Management cover during this period
- Improving contract management
- Improving and implementing contract negotiation
- Recruitment and assessment
- Preparing for the implementation of the Regional Framework

Resource Implications

38. Consideration of the MTFs is incorporated in the annual budget setting exercise whereby the authority's plan to meet its sufficiency duty is financed.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None

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Equality and Human Rights Implications

39. The Leicestershire and Rutland Adoption Agency has been recently commended by Stonewall for its inclusive recruitment stance, particularly with regard to same sex adopters.