



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 5 NOVEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the activity of the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Agency for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Agency. It undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering.
3. Under the National Minimum Standards (NMS), (25.7) all Fostering agencies are required to provide a report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the activity and work of the Fostering Agency and Fostering Panel. The Annual Report is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Background

4. The County Council operates an integrated Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015. Whilst the services are combined, the Fostering Service is subject to its own set of standards, being a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Summary of Report

5. The service recognises that it operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placements. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:
 - Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
 - Reduction of young people requiring residential placements
 - Increase in the numbers of kinship carers
 - Increase the number of Supported Lodgings providers
 - Increase Leicestershire's specialist foster carers
 - Ensuring carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.

6. A range of work is completed by several teams within the service to ensure priorities and targets are met. This includes:-
- The Recruitment Team - enhancing the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers
 - The Assessment Team - assessing prospective foster carers and ensuring quality reports are presented to the Fostering Panel
 - The Team around the Child – supporting foster carers to provide the best possible care
 - The Kinship Team – assessing prospective foster carers who are known to the child (e.g. family or friends)
7. Highlights of achievements in 2018-19 include:
- Introduction of a new fostering fee scheme from August 2018
 - Net recruitment of in-house mainstream and specialist foster carers
 - Completion and positive response to the annual foster carers survey
 - Improved peer-peer support offer including five locality groups, newsletters and community events
 - Introduction of foster carers portal
 - Introduction of Looked After Children and Care Leavers Memory box
 - Foster carer mentoring - implementation of a new offer
 - Quality support – kept supervising social worker caseloads manageable
 - Two Support Workers trained in level 1 Theraplay support workers

2018-19 performance overview

8. Fostering recruitment: 720 expressions of interest to become foster carers (previously 585) were made in 2018/19. 142 initial visits (previously 148) were made and 71 stage one assessments (previously 58) were completed. This led to 25 mainstream households approved (previously 16). 16 carers were deregistered and 9 other carer types were approved (previously 6).
9. Connected carer recruitment: 180 Viability Assessments were undertaken of which 57 progressed to full assessment and panel
10. Stability and permanence: 20 young people remained in their foster placements under Staying Put arrangements and 90% of young people in Supported Lodgings have placement stability. The Department has 38 approved independent visitors and year upon year feedback through the foster carer survey has been more positive, and through the approach of asking pertinent questions and giving the carers the opportunity to rate our service. Foster carers tell us that this means:
- Keeping supervising social workers' caseloads low so that foster carers have a good level of support and advice
 - Ensuring training is relevant to the needs of the children

11. Overview of targets and priorities for 2019-20 include:

- Marketing –
 - Ongoing mainstream fostering campaign
 - Support Lodgings campaign
 - Intensive recruitment campaign Specialist Carers (September 2019)
- Recruitment –
 - 25 mainstream carers (Gross)
 - 4 Specialist carers
 - 3 Supported lodgings
- Retention –
 - Develop the Enhanced Carers Scheme
 - Develop the therapeutic parenting style with the support of MISTLE
 - Keep supervising social worker caseloads manageable – approximately 17 to each full FTE, depending on nature of each case
 - Increase Independent Visitor offer
 - Opportunity for 2 DPST support workers to gain training in Therapeutic Parenting, DDP or Theraplay
 - Leicestershire Foster Carers Association to be the neutral person to undertake exit interviews when carers leave the service
 - Improved Foster Carer Forum
 - Continue to develop the Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of service, including reflective supervision and embedding PODS.
 - Review of DPST and MISTLE and decision regarding future model.

Conclusion

12. The Fostering Service has achieved significant success over the last year in the recruitment of foster carers in a competitive market. Within the context of the MTFS, increased in house provision is essential to providing high quality cost effective care for children. The investment in the Fostering Service is a priority to ensure a continued focus on recruiting and retaining in-house foster carers.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

13. There are no equality or human rights implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Leicestershire Fostering Agency Annual Report 2018/19

Officers to Contact

Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director

Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

Tel: 0116 3052649

Nicci Collins, Head of Service

Nicci.Collins@leics.gov.uk

Tel: 0116 3054504

Joss Longman, Service Manager

Joss.Longman@leics.gov.uk

Tel: 0116 3053288