

Fostering Report

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the executive side of the local authority:
- Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months;
 - Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
 - Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.
- (Standard 25.7)
- 1.2 The last report, covering the period July to December 2011 was provided in February. A report covering the period January to March 2012 is presented for the first time today. This report covers the period April to September 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the report

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To comply with Guidance and regulations and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 The recommendations of the Fostering Inspection 2011, which were reported in the last report, have either been implemented or are being taken forward through business and performance plans.

- 4.2 The membership of the fostering panel complies with Guidance and Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. It consists of an independent chair and vice-chair, an elected member, a qualified social worker, a health service representative, a foster carer and fostering social worker, a care-experienced young person, and a residential worker. The panel is supported by a professional advisor and also has access to medical and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker is the Service Director, Specialist Services.
- 4.3 The panel chair for the last six years has resigned and her replacement, a fostering manager with a great deal of experience in both the public and voluntary sectors, started in September. A new qualified social worker member and new elected member have also recently joined the panel, and we are currently recruiting a replacement for another panel member who is resigning.
- 4.4 The number of people expressing an interest in fostering has remained steady, with mainstream approvals more or less keeping pace with de-registrations. The number of approved friends and family carers has increased and now seems to have levelled out. The total number of carers has fallen, mainly due to a change of policy in relation to support carers which will result in the de-registration of most carers in this category within twelve months. The number of children placed has decreased as we have been able to reduce the number placed over numbers.
- 4.5 In September 2011 the dedicated fostering marketing officer was transferred to the corporate marketing and communications team. A programme of promotional activities took place to coincide with National Fostering Fortnight from 8 to 21 May. The corporate communications and marketing team has reviewed the marketing strategy and produced a plan for the coming year. Recruitment is the subject of a separate report before the board today.
- 4.6 The number of referrals to the fostering duty system has fallen during the year. At the same time the proportion of placements with our own carers relative to placements with independent fostering agencies has increased. Fostering duty is still providing a 9.00 to 5.00 service every working day. Responsibility to trawl for external placements transferred to the Commissioning Team on 1 April 2012.
- 4.7 New requirements need to be met in relation to the assessment, approval, training and support of Friends and Family carers. We have now recruited to a new social worker post to enable us to develop assessment, training and support tailored to the needs of this group of carers. Dedicated training of friends and family carers has been successfully piloted.
- 4.8 On 1 April 2011 the Government introduced a new right of appeal for foster carers and people applying to foster. Three cases have been referred to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism from Derby. One was subsequently withdrawn. In the other two the IRM upheld the decision of the Agency Decision Maker.
- 4.9 As part of the strategic commissioning review, we are carrying out a review of the fostering service, supported by the commissioning team. An initial scoping report has been produced and a stakeholder event is planned for October. The review focuses particularly on marketing, recruitment and retention, specialist schemes and commissioning from external providers.

- 4.10 Revision of the Fostering Manual is underway and will be completed by December 2012.
- 4.11 Fostering allowances and fees have been reviewed and the increases, which took effect on 1 April, have been included in our new allowances booklet which was published in June.
- 4.12 We have published a Derby Foster Carers' Charter which sets out agreed expectations and commitments of both foster carers and the fostering service. The charter is to be launched in November.
- 4.13 We are working with the Fostering Network to stimulate the development of a Foster Carer Association, which has been dormant in Derby for two years. A group of interested carers has participated in a training day, and further training is planned in November.
- 4.14 We have held an event for foster carers and their families to recognise their achievements and thank them for their commitment to fostering for Derby.
- 4.15 Most of our mainstream carers have now completed the required Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers. Efforts are now being put into supporting Friends and Family carers to achieve the same.
- 4.16 We are planning to move away from a paper-based file system to electronic file records. The changeover will take place on 15 October.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 Not applicable

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Legal officer	N/A
Financial officer	N/A
Human Resources officer	N/A
Service Director(s)	N/A
Other(s)	

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Activity Report Appendix 3 – Duty Activity Appendix 4 – Fostering Service Report – May 2012

IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. We have recruited to an additional post in the recruitment and assessment team to enable us to increase foster carer recruitment and keep pace with demand for friends and family carers. A budget increase in 2012-13 has allowed fostering allowances to be up-rated to keep pace with the recommended national minimum rate.
- 1.2 Any increase in the shortfall of in-house placements has a direct financial effect due to the much higher placement costs in the independent sector. It is therefore essential to maintain and if possible increase the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
- 1.3 The cost of appeal to the IRM falls on the fostering service provider. The fee is around £2500 for each case.

Legal

- 2.1 The fostering function of the Council is regulated by the 1989 Children Act and the Associated Fostering Regulations, guidance and the minimum standards published in 2011.

Personnel

- 3.1 Since June 2011, the fostering service has been managed by a lead service manager who is also responsible for children's residential services and three service managers. Previously a Head of Service had combined the management of fostering and adoption. One service manager post was covered on a temporary, part-time basis from October to May due to maternity leave. 16.8 full time equivalent social workers carry out the full range of fostering activities.

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in relation to children being placed and for adults who apply to become foster carers. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and further efforts will be made this year to recruit carers from BME communities and carers for disabled children.

Health and Safety

- 5.1 This is considered at all stages of the recruitment, assessment, training and support

of foster carers. All the managers in the service have completed mandatory Health and Safety training in the last three months.

Environmental Sustainability

6.1 Not applicable

Asset Management

7.1 Not applicable

Risk Management

8.1 Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

9.1 Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through business plans and individual performance plans throughout the service

Appendix 2

Activity report

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Recruitment												
Expressions of interest	44	34	23	22	35	30	42	43	24	31	21	26
Initial Visits	12	27	7	7	6	8	6	6	5	5	11	14
Mainstream applications received	1	6	1	3	3	0	1	3	1	1	2	1
Friends & family applications received	2	4	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	0
Approvals	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	3	0	1	2
De-registration	0	6	2	0	0	3	1	5	0	4	5	4
Carers												
Mainstream	102	100	100	100	102	101	100	99	101	99	99	100
Friends & family	23	22	21	25	27	28	29	28	27	27	27	27
Respite only	14	14	13	13	13	13	13	13	14	13	14	19
Support Carers	28	27	27	27	27	27	27	26	26	25	21	14
Link only	18	17	17	18	19	18	18	19	19	19	19	18
Total	185	180	178	183	188	187	187	185	187	183	180	178
Placements												
All children	223	223	225	220	217	216	212	204	205	205	196	197

Appendix 3

Duty activity

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Total
Referrals	39	53	31	39	38	39	26	37	25	35	25	31	418
Placed with DCC carers	4	12	7	4	7	10	5	14	5	7	5	4	84
Referred for external placement	2	12	10	6	9	7	5	3	6	2	2	0	64
Placed for respite only	16	9	8	16	8	2	12	9	5	12	8	18	123



Report of the Strategic Director Children and Young People's Service

FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT

Summary

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the executive side of the local authority:

- d. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months;
- e. Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
- f. Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

(Standard 25.7)

The last report, covering the period July to December 2011, was provided in February. This report covers the period January to March 2012.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Fostering Inspection 2011

The recommendations of the Fostering Inspection 2011, which were reported in the last report, have either been implemented or are being taken forward through business and performance plans.

Fostering Panel

The membership of the fostering panel complies with Guidance and Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. It consists of an independent chair and vice-chair, an elected member, a qualified social worker, a health service representative, a foster carer and fostering social worker, a care-experienced young

person, and a residential worker. The panel is supported by a specialist advisor who is a team manager in the fostering service. It also has access to medical and legal advice as required. The Agency Decision Maker is the Service Director, Specialist Services.

The Panel Chair for the last six years is resigning and recruitment of a new independent chair with suitable experience and skills is underway.

Activity report

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Recruitment									
Expressions of interest	18	24	52	44	34	23	22	35	30
Initial Visits	10	4	08	12	27	7	7	6	8
Mainstream applications received	0	0	3	1	6	1	3	3	0
Friends & family applications received			2	2	4	2	1	2	1
Approvals	1	1	3	0	1	0	0	2	0
De-registration	0	0	4	0	6	2	0	0	3
Carers									
Mainstream	104	104	102	102	100	100	100	102	101
Friends & family	22	22	23	23	22	21	25	27	28
Respite only	14	15	14	14	14	13	13	13	13
Support Carers	27	27	28	28	27	27	27	27	27
Link only	18	18	18	18	17	17	18	19	18
Total	185	186	185	185	180	178	183	188	187
Placements									
All children	220	220	223	223	223	225	220	217	216

The number of people expressing an interest in fostering has remained steady. Two new mainstream approvals were matched by two resignations. The number of approved friends and family carers is increasing; three new sets of carers were approved. A programme of promotional activities is planned to coincide with National Fostering Fortnight from 8 to 21 May.

Duty activity

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Referrals	22	40	15	43	37	42	199
Placed in-house	2	8	1	5	3	6	25
Placed externally	2	12	6	1	5	5	31
Placed with a family member	1	1	3	0	0	1	6
Placed in children's home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Placed in respite care	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Emergency placement – returned home	2	1	0	0	0	1	4
Withdrawn	5	0	1	1	0	5	12
Carried over	7	19	9				

The number of referrals to the fostering duty system continued to rise and the first quarter of 2012 was even busier than the last of 2011 as the number of children becoming looked after has risen. More children have been placed in Independent Fostering Agencies although every effort is made to place them in-house before referring to an agency. The time taken to place with Derby City carers, sometimes outside the carer's range of approval or over the normal fostering limit of three children, and the time spent searching for external placements has increased the duty workload. As a result fostering duty was increased from afternoons only to full days. Responsibility to trawl for external placements transferred to the Commissioning Team on 1 April 2012.

Service Developments

New requirements need to be met in relation to the assessment, approval, training and support of Friends and Family carers. We are currently trying to recruit to a new social worker post to enable us to develop a specialist resource with the potential, if this area continues to grow, to reduce the overall number of mainstream placements required.

As part of the strategic commissioning review, we are carrying out a review of the fostering service, supported by the commissioning team.

Revision of the Fostering Manual is underway and will be completed by July 2012.

Some changes are needed to the Children's Guide to Fostering and they will be done in the next few months.

Fostering allowances and fees have been reviewed and the increases, which took effect on 1 April, will be included in a new allowances booklet which will be published shortly.

We have published a Derby Foster Carers' Charter which sets out agreed expectations and commitments of both foster carers and the fostering service. The charter is attached.

We are working with the Fostering Network to stimulate the development of a Foster Carer Association, which has been dormant in Derby for two years.

We are holding an event for foster carers and their families on May 17 to recognise their achievements and thank them for their commitment to fostering for Derby.

Most of our mainstream carers have now completed the required Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers. Efforts are now being put into supporting Friends and Family carers to achieve the same.

We are continuing to review our marketing and recruitment strategy with the aim of increasing the number of carers overall and the number of carers in specific groups such as minority ethnic groups.

We are exploring with a neighbouring authority the opportunities for jointly developing specialist fostering schemes.

We are planning to move away from a paper-based file system to electronic file records.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. We are currently recruiting to an additional post in the recruitment and assessment team to enable us to increase foster carer recruitment and keep pace with demand for friends and family carers. A budget increase in 2012-13 has allowed fostering allowances to be up rated to keep pace with the recommended national minimum rate.

Any increase in the shortfall of in-house placements has a direct financial effect due to the much higher placement costs in the independent sector. It is therefore essential to maintain and if possible increase the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Legal

The fostering function of the Council is regulated by the 1989 Children Act and the Associated Fostering Regulations, guidance and the minimum standards published in 2011.

Personnel

The fostering service consists of 3 full time Team Managers and 16.8 social workers who carry out the full range of fostering activities. The increase in demand for Family and Friends fostering assessments is an ongoing staffing pressure. The service has been subject to temporary management arrangements and the management of the recruitment team is still covered on a part-time basis.

Equalities Impact

The service continues to give due consideration to race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, religion, and disability in relation to children being placed and for adults who apply to become foster carers. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and further efforts will be made this year to recruit carers from BME communities and carers for disabled children.

Health and Safety

This is considered at all stages of the recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. All the managers in the service have completed mandatory Health and Safety training in the last three months.

Environmental sustainability

Not applicable

Asset management

Not applicable

Risk Management

Risk is managed at all stages of the fostering process.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

Corporate and departmental objectives are pursued through business plans and individual performance plans throughout the service