

Fostering Agency Report

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the executive side of the local authority:
- a. Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months;
 - b. 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;
 - c. Satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

(Standard 25.7)

The Fostering Agency is required to produce a Statement of Purpose which updated once a year.

- 1.2 The last report, covering the period April to September 2012 was provided in February. This report covers the period October to December 2012. The updated Statement of Purpose is also presented with this report (Appendix 4).

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Sub-Board to consider and comment upon the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To consider and comment upon compliance with guidance and regulations and National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 A full inspection of the Fostering Service took place in October and November 2011. The service will in future be inspected as part of the new framework for inspections of services to looked after children.
- 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 other independent members with relevant experience. 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 Two new independent members and two qualified social workers have been recruited to the panel to ensure there is a pool of suitably qualified and experienced members available.
- 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 and the number of approved carers in each category apart from support carers more or less unchanged. The number of approved support carers continues to fall as a result of a change of practice. The number of children placed has continued to decrease as we have been able to reduce the number placed over numbers. There are now 13 children in three placements over the normal fostering limit of three.
- 4.5 The fostering service works with a dedicated fostering marketing officer in the corporate marketing and communications team to deliver a programme of promotional activities. The recruitment and marketing strategy is continually reviewed and updated. The market is highly competitive and all agencies report difficulties in enough carers to meet demand.
- 4.6 The number of referrals to the fostering duty system is slightly lower than in the 12 months to September 2012. The proportion of placements with our own carers relative to placements with independent fostering agencies has is about the same. Fostering duty is still providing a 9.00 to 5.00 service every working day. The fostering review is exploring alternative models of commissioning external placements.
- 4.7 Two social worker posts are now dedicated to assessing, training and supporting friends and family carers and specific training and support packages are being developed.
- 4.8 One set of foster carers has been deregistered in this period due to concerns. There have been no further appeals to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism.

- 4.9 The fostering and commissioning teams are analysing messages from the review of the fostering service and will be developing an action plan in relation to foster carer recruitment in the next few weeks. Further work is planned on retention, specialist schemes and commissioning from external providers.
- 4.10 We are exploring the possibility of replacing our foster carer manual with an off-the-shelf manual published by the Fostering Network.
- 4.12 The Derby Foster Carers' Charter which sets out agreed expectations and commitments of both foster carers and the fostering service is to be launched in the New Year.
- 4.13 With support from the Fostering Network we have revived the Foster Carer Association, which will also be formally launched in the New Year.
- 4.14 We have held a Christmas party 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 and Friends and Family carers are now being supported to achieve the same.
- 4.16 We have successfully moved away from a paper-based file system to electronic file records. The changeover took 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)	Mark Barratt – Director of Specialist Services
Other(s)	N/A

For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices:	Rod Jones 01332 643815 rod.jones@derby.gov.uk None Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 - Activity Report Appendix 3 - Duty Activity Appendix 4 – Fostering Statement of Purpose
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IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 The cost of providing the Fostering Service is contained within fixed cost-centre budgets. A budget increase in 2012-13 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 The service is currently managed by a lead service manager for regulated services. It is planned to bring the fostering and adoption services under the management of a single lead manager by April 2013. There are 2.8 whole time equivalent team managers and 16.8 whole 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 None arising from this report

Asset Management

7.1 None arising from this report

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

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Recruitment												
Expressions of interest	22	35	30	42	43	24	31	21	26	20	22	17
Initial Visits	7	6	8	6	6	5	5	11	14	9	4	1
Mainstream applications received	3	3	0	1	3	1	1	2	1	3	1	2
Friends & family applications received	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1
Approvals	0	5	1	1	1	3	0	1	2	2	1	0
De-registration	0	0	3	1	5	0	4	5	4	2	2	5
Carers												
Mainstream	100	102	101	100	99	101	99	99	100	100	100	100
Friends & family	25	27	28	29	28	27	27	27	27	27	28	26
Respite only	13	13	13	13	13	14	13	14	14	14	14	14
Support Carers	27	27	27	27	26	26	25	21	18	18	17	14
Link only	18	19	18	18	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
Total	183	188	187	187	185	187	183	180	178	178	178	173
Placements												
All children	220	217	216	212	204	205	205	196	197	190	189	187

Appendix 3

Duty activity

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Referrals	39	38	39	26	37	25	35	25	31	39	56	17	407
Placed with DCC carers	4	7	10	5	14	5	7	5	4	8	8	4	81
Referred for external placement	6	9	7	5	3	6	2	2	0	6	7	2	55
Placed for respite only	16	8	2	12	9	5	12	8	18	20	21	5	136