



Date of Meeting: 6 December 2019

Lead Member: Cllr Andrew Parry - Lead Member for Children, Education and Early Help

Lead Officer: Sarah Parker - Executive Director for People - Children

Executive Summary:

The committee are asked to consider the Annual Fostering Service report which sets out the activity and performance of the service including matters relating to the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers, Foster Carer training and the training and development of the teams. The report also contains a summary of the activity during Foster Care Fortnight, a national event celebrating foster care and raising awareness.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

Not applicable as the report is for information.

Budget:

Not applicable as the report is for information.

Risk Assessment:

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: HIGH/MEDIUM/LOW (Delete as appropriate)

Residual Risk HIGH/MEDIUM/LOW (Delete as appropriate)

Other Implications:

Report is for information

Recommendation:

The committee are asked to consider the content of the report and Foster Care Fortnight addendum.

Reason for Recommendation:

It is a regulatory requirement that an annual report for a local authority fostering services is presented to elected members. Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011 (England)

Appendices:

Foster Care Fortnight Addendum Report to the Main Report

Background Papers:

Fostering Standards and Regulations 2011 (England)

Officer Contact

Name: Tim Wells

Tel: 01305225738

Email: Tim.wells@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Fostering Service Annual Report April 2018-March 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 It has been another busy year for the Fostering Team, embedding the modernising fostering changes and continuing to improve our processes and procedures. The highlights include: development of an improved spreadsheet to capture our performance management data and enable us to complete the annual Ofsted dataset more quickly and easily; the team move from Monkton Park to County Hall; working with the MOSAIC team to ensure that we have the forms and workflows needed to enable the work of fostering; the introduction of aids to practice (crib) cards to our Fostering Social Workers; the introduction to our foster carers of the new skills based fees scheme and all-inclusive age-related allowances; improvement in our training and development offer to foster carers; revision of the annual review process; paperless panels; working with our recruitment company Whitehead Ross (WREC) on the marketing plan and delivering assessment-ready people to our Pre-Approval Team.

2. Fostering Service Infrastructure and Processes

2.1 Working with our Data Analysis Team, we built an extensive spreadsheet to capture the information needed for performance management and the dataset upload to Ofsted. We are planning to achieve the upload for 2018-2019 in record time as a result.

2.2 The Safeguarding and Standards (SaS) Team took on the role of undertaking the annual reviews on our foster carers to ensure independent scrutiny and quality assurance. Two interim Fostering IROs were appointed – one covering East and one covering West. We are continually improving the process of reviews, including on MOSAIC. We have introduced a three-yearly cycle of reviews being presented at the Fostering and Permanence Panel, to tie with foster carers renewing their DBS and medical checks. In the intervening years, the annual review is conducted by the Fostering Service and SaS, then signed off by the Agency Decision Maker as an internal process rather than being presented at panel, unless the review is for a change in approval or following a managing allegations process.

2.3 In July 2018 the Fostering Service moved from Monkton Park into County Hall. One of the positives is being co-located with the Placements Team to enable easier updates on our foster carers' availability, and aid matching of children to placements. Being closer to other Children's Services Teams, including the LAC Teams, enables improved working together.

2.4 In April 2018, Whitehead-Ross Education and Consulting (WREC) began their contract with Dorset Council, to recruit new foster carers. They have been working closely with DC's Communications Team and the Fostering Service throughout the year to deliver publicity and marketing activities and undertake initial enquiries. In the Autumn, their remit was extended to complete the initial assessment visits and provide our Pre-Approval Team with people who are ready to undertake the full assessment to become mainstream foster carers. WREC, together with the fostering service, have been contracted to deliver 70 new foster carers over a two-year period, from April 2018. Monthly review meetings are in place to monitor delivery to the contract.

- 2.5 The Fostering Panel became paperless during 2018. Savings to staff time and postage costs will be estimated to be in the region of £37,000. Further work on modernising the Fostering and Permanence Panel is planned to be undertaken during the 2019-2020 year.
3. Learning and Development for Fostering Social Workers and Managers
 - 3.1 All of our Team Managers and most of our social workers, completed the Reinvigorating Social Work (RSW) programme over the last year. This programme was aimed at empowering social workers and team managers to improve outcomes for children first time around. The programme consisted of some externally delivered training, action learning sessions and workshops delivered by Dorset Council staff. At the end of the course, social workers submitted portfolios containing reflective learning logs and examples of application of learning in current casework. The RSW programme has afforded the team opportunities to develop their social work practice and embrace current models of relationship building and strengths-based delivery.
 - 3.2 The Fostering Service has quarterly team training and development away half days for staff on a variety of topics associated with fostering. As well as attending the range of learning and development courses provided internally, members of the Fostering Service have gained qualifications at Bournemouth University in Risk Assessment and Decision-Making Practice and to become Practice Educators to support social work student placements in the Fostering Service. Staff have also attended external conferences and are linked to the South West Fostering Managers Forum (lead by Fostering Network), the South West Recruitment Forum and the South West Learning and Development Forum for Fostering. The knowledge gained at these events is disseminated across the fostering service.
4. Learning and Development Programme for Foster Carers
 - 4.1 We worked closely with L&OD to produce a training brochure for foster carers for April 2018-March 2019 (and one for April 2019-March 2020), with a wide variety of training programmes, some of which were specially commissioned, to suit all carers from those who are newly approved, to those who are more experienced. Our training courses are offered to all foster carers, mainstream and connected persons.
 - 4.2 Our preparatory course for prospective foster carers was revised during the year and is now known as Journey to Foster and includes a session delivered by Participation People.
5. Recruitment and Retention Strategy
 - 5.1 The recruitment side of the strategy is being delivered by an externally commissioned organisation, Whitehead Ross Education Consultancy (WREC). WREC liaises with the Communications and Fostering Services to implement the marketing plan which is continually updated. New banners, a stand, posters and fliers were printed featuring a range of images of children and adults. Activities over the last year included radio campaigns with Heart FM and Wessex FM. WREC maintained social media accounts and promoted fostering via talks to various community and professional groups, alongside general campaigns in public venues such as coffee shops, supermarkets, libraries etc. When the film 'Instant Family' was released, WREC took their stand to Weymouth Cineworld to engage the cinema goers and promote fostering. They also ran webinars (both live and recorded). Campaigns are tied into national and local events, times of year and themes e.g. Foster Care Fortnight, the seasons, 'empty nesters' in September, Christmas, famous people who were fostered etc. The themes are constantly refreshed so they feel new and not

'the same old message'. WREC also launched a 'Fostering 500' campaign – the idea being to recognise 500 companies and individuals who support and promote fostering. They are photographed being given a certificate and this is put on social media – both our social media and theirs - giving us an increased reach.

- 5.2 A Facebook page, local radio interviews and editorials in local newspapers (free), telling a personal story alongside video clips of foster carers, their children and looked after children works well in promoting fostering. Live face chats and having the recorded webinar which people can view at any time has also been successful. What has not worked so well is paid for advertising in newspapers, magazines, and on the radio. It is a lot of money for little return.
- 5.3 Several measures were employed during last year to aid retention of our existing foster carers. The new fees and allowances scheme was introduced on 1st April 2018. This saw a move away from fees being based on the needs of the child to being based on the evidenced skills and experience of the foster carers. Fees are set at four levels, with clear criteria at each level, to enable a career progression for foster carers who wish to pursue this. Foster carers need to evidence at their annual review that they continue to meet the skills level they are paid at or that they meet a higher skills level. Our new training and development offer to foster supports the fees and allowances scheme. Stability meetings have been instituted and have taken place regularly throughout the year to support continuation of placements or to enable a planned move for a looked after child where this is needed.
- 5.4 The format of support groups was changed to provide evening and day time support groups which, although geographically located across Dorset, are open to all foster carers across the county, rather than just those in that local area. The Awards Ceremony held at Bryanston on 6th October 2018 recognised foster carers with long service and those who had gone 'above and beyond' their role. We also gave awards to foster carers sons and daughters who had been particularly supportive of the foster children in their home and foster carers' children receive an annual £10.00 token during Sons and Daughters month every October. Feedback from the foster carers at our Foster Carer Forum on 13th March was very positive about the new fees and allowances scheme and the developments in the Fostering Service generally. Carers stated that they felt valued, clear about the expectations of them and part of a more professional service.
- 5.5 Our annual Fostering Fair and Picnic planned for 29th July 2018 unfortunately had to be cancelled due to bad weather. This event is planned this year for 28th July 2019 and will include a climbing wall, swimming pool, rounders, bouncy castle, bungee run, arts and crafts, face painting, story-telling and, for the first time, a children's bake-off competition!

6. Staffing

- 6.1 We were fully staffed, and our staff group remained stable throughout last year with one person retiring. Sadly, our panel adviser, Ann Craft, died in service in August 2018 following a short illness. Teresa Millard, one of our Fostering Social Workers, was recruited to the panel adviser post and started in October 2018. We successfully recruited to Teresa's vacant post within the Fostering Service.

7. Data April 2018 - March 2019

Number of Enquiries -243
Number of Initial Assessment Visits -140
Number of Application Packs Issued - 72
Number of Closures following Application Pack being issued – 48*
Number of Mainstream Foster Carers Approved - 21
Number of De-registered Mainstream Carers - 17**
Total Number of Mainstream Carers as at 31st March 2018 - 144
Number of Connected Persons Assessments Commenced - 49
Number of Connected Persons Assessments Closed - 24
Number of Connected Persons Approved - 19
Number of Approved Connected Persons Closed after Approval - 2
Total Number of Connected Persons Carers as at 31st March 2018 - 53

* Reasons for closures following application packs being issued:

12	No longer wish to pursue fostering
8	No response from applicant despite several attempts to contact
7	Applicant stated that it was not the right time for them
4	Having/trying for a baby
3	Personal reasons
3	Health reasons
3	Closed at Stage 1 due to concerns in references/DBS/application
2	Chose to foster for another service (1 chose Bournemouth as they live closer and 1 chose an IFA)
2	Currently foster for another service and decided not to transfer
1	Not enough availability to foster
1	No spare bedroom
1	Moved out of area
1	Decided to pursue adoption instead

** Reasons for de-registrations:

8	Retired from fostering (one carer continuing to offer Staying Put arrangements)
3	De-registered following management of allegations process
2	Foster to adopt foster carers and subsequently adopted the child(ren)
1	Resigned as she moved out of the area
1	Resigned due to being awarded an SGO for the child
1	Resigned due to family commitments and state they will reconsider when situation settled
1	De-registered due to long period of not taking placements or engaging with their social worker

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Data for April 2019 to 08.10.2019

Approvals

- 11 sets of MAINSTREAM Carers approved

- 9 sets of CONNECTED PERSONS Carers approved

De-registrations

- 11 sets of MAINSTREAM Carers have deregistered for a number of reasons –
 1. 2 have gone over to Staying Put
 2. 2 have deregistered because of an allegation
 3. 1 has deregistered as they have adopted another child so have no spare rooms (Cornwall/Hedges)
 4. The remaining 6 have deregistered for either personal reasons or retirement
- 10 sets of CONNECTED PERSONS Carers have deregistered because –
 1. 3 have transferred to BCP
 2. In 4 cases, the child has left their carer
 3. In 1 case, the child has turned 18, now Staying Put Carer
 4. In 1 case, an SGO was awarded
 5. In the final case, there was an allegation
- It's difficult to predict how many we'll have by March, but we currently have 19 Temporary approved Carers and 14 Mainstream Carers being assessed at the moment.

8. Summary

- 8.1 The year has seen us continue in our journey to modernise the Fostering Service. This has been achieved in a climate of changes in Children's Services, most notably within our senior management and leadership arrangements. We are working proactively to reach our target of increasing the number and range of in-house placements to offer to our Dorset looked after children, alongside continuing measures to aid retention of foster carers. The coming year offers the opportunity to consolidate the contractual arrangements and fully evaluate the effectiveness. We are looking to form a focus group of foster carers to work with us on developments to the Fostering Service and will continue with our close links to Participation People to obtain the views of our looked after children and young people.
- 8.2 Currently the demand for foster carers outstrips supply. Successful recruitment and retention within Dorset is being developed in conjunction with Whitehead Ross, who have been commissioned to recruit a diverse range of foster carers, utilising images, which are reflective of our current society, incorporating age and social trends to enable us to deliver an effective fostering service.

We have concern within the fostering service, that our Fostering population is largely made up of people over the age of 50, is losing experienced carers through retirement, this being not just a local issue, but nationally.

The lack of high-quality carers also means that as a service we are struggling to

support children and young people with complex needs, as well as older children and those with behavioural issues.

Foster Carers are volunteers who receive an allowance to cover their costs. This is augmented by a fee, based on training and level of experience. Foster Carers are paid, to reflect the skills and experience utilised to care for children and young people with complex needs. It is difficult for a foster carer to hold down another job, given the unpredictable nature of a placement, but income from fostering after expenses is modest, and uncertain. Placements can end suddenly, and it may be several weeks before another begins, during which no allowance is paid.

Record numbers of children are being taken into care but changes to the way we live, and work mean the fostering workforce is shrinking

A typical foster carer is in their mid-50s, and there is a distinct lack of younger families coming forward to take their place.

Why is this? I have no doubt that they are at least as generous and caring as previous generations. But demographics are conspiring against foster care, bringing change to the way we live and work.

Families are having children later, and those children remain in the family home for longer, dependent on their parents well into their 20s. Their parents are increasingly responsible for the care of their own mums and dads in old age. The period of years that might have been devoted to the care of foster children is getting squeezed.

Many women who would have fostered in the past now have careers. There are far fewer stay-at-home mothers than there used to be. Nowadays those women (and indeed most women at every level of the social scale) are juggling careers alongside their birth children, needing dual incomes.

Fostering for many women is now a far bigger commitment than having birth children, because women largely expect to return to work after having a child. With fostering, that's would prove extremely difficult. There are so many meetings, many children not in full time education. Most families simply cannot afford this.

Employment trends are unhelpful. The shift to self-employment and zero hour contracts creates financial instability at home, which is not conducive to foster care. Paradoxically, the "national living wage" is reframing the conversation about paid employment. It is a test of a carer's 24/7 commitment to vulnerable children when you know that there probably is a part-time job just around the corner that will make a meaningful contribution towards the household bills. Just as nurses and care assistants are rethinking their career options, so too are foster carers.

The cost of housing is another significant factor. Having a spare bedroom has become an unaffordable luxury for many. Those lucky enough to have one may need to rent it out to help pay the mortgage or rent. Few families can afford not to downsize once grown-up children eventually fly the nest.

Renting a home, as more families now do, is no reason not to foster. But it is more difficult without long-term security of tenure. Landlords can be picky with tenants, and unconventional families with an assortment of children don't tick the right boxes. In any case, families obliged to move every couple of years are less likely to set down roots in the local community, which are important for fostering.

Our homes are getting smaller. Typically, new builds are some 10 sq m smaller than those built at the turn of the century. Larger, older houses are being repurposed as flats. Given the housing shortage, all this makes good sense. But it doesn't help foster care.

Generally, the changes to the political economic landscape is having a major impact upon us to recruited and retain carers.

Rebecca Holmes
Operational Manager - Permanency

Please see attached Addendum report regarding Foster Care Fortnight 2019

Addendum to Annual Report re Foster Care Fortnight 2019

Foster Care Fortnight is The Fostering Network's annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering and to show how foster care transforms lives. It is the UK's biggest foster carer recruitment campaign. Foster Care Fortnight 2019 is taking place from 13th to 26th May. Please see Dorset's attached plan of activities for this year. The WREC Team have been joined in their activities by foster carers and members of the Fostering Team. On Tuesday 14th May the Fostering Service, alongside the Placements Team, held a day long pedal-athon and a cake and craft sale. We raised £250.00 for the Dorset Care Leavers charity. So far Foster Care Fortnight has generated 8 enquiries from people interested in learning more about fostering. Foster Care Fortnight is just one in a number of campaigns as part of our building relationships with members of the community to raise the profile of fostering and generate wider public interest. We would anticipate therefore that the impact on numbers of enquiries will more likely be seen following Foster Care Fortnight rather than during it.

Day	Fostering Network Focus	Local Location Event	Activity	Who
Monday 13 th May	A welcome to FCF from Fostering Network Chief Executive – highlighting why have a FCF campaign and what do we hope to achieve	<p>Blandford Job Fair at the Corn Exchange</p> <p>Sherborne Oliver’s Café – drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs</p> <p>Dorchester Keep 106 – Radio Interview</p>	Share on social Media	Jo/ Fiona
			Local welcome to FCF – overview of plans for week – Facebook live	Jo
			Check in on Facebook	Jo & Laura
			Information stand	
			Check in on Facebook	Catherine & Sarah
			Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo
Share on Facebook	Jo			
Tuesday 14 th May	What is Fostering? – Basic information about the different types of fostering as		Share Fostering Network info	Jo/ Fiona

	well as the differences between fostering and adoption	<p>County Hall Pedal-a-thon</p> <p>Cake and Craft Sale</p> <p>Weymouth Coffee #1 - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs</p>	<p>Facebook live – Q&A session</p> <p>Photos and support on Facebook</p> <p>Check in on Facebook</p> <p>Foster Friendly and placard photos</p>	<p>Jo</p> <p>Fostering and Placement Team</p> <p>Fostering Team</p> <p>Jo</p> <p>Jo</p>
Wednesday 15th May	Local Focus	<p>Interview with Sarah Parker – Director of Children’s Services & Foster Carer</p> <p>Dorset Council Preparation for Retirement</p>	<p>Share on Facebook</p> <p>Fostering Presentation</p> <p>Live webinar Info Sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2pm • 7pm 	<p>Fiona/Jo</p> <p>Jo</p> <p>Jo</p>
Thursday 16th May	The Process of applying and approval – timescales from first enquiry, types of questions prospective Foster Carers can expect, and the nature of support and assessment throughout the process		<p>Share Fostering Network info</p> <p>Share recording from live webinar</p> <p>Foster in Dorset Facebook Live – 1. Making an enquiry</p> <p>Check in on Facebook</p>	<p>Jo/ Fiona</p> <p>Jo</p> <p>Jo & Catherine</p>

		Verwood The Hollow - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs	Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo Jo
Friday 17th May	Local Focus	Interview with Bridport based Foster Carer Bridport Chocolate Café - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs	Share on Facebook Check in on Facebook Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo/ Fiona Catherine Catherine
Saturday 18th/ Sunday 19th May	Why foster – over the weekend we will be putting out success stories or positive quotes on social media from Foster Carers and young people		Share Fostering Network info	Jo

Week 2

Monday 20th May	Local focus	Interview with North Dorset based carer <u>Shaftesbury</u> High Street Bakery and Café - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs	Share on Facebook Live webinar Info Session • 8pm Check in on Facebook Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo/ Fiona Jo Catherine Catherine
Tuesday 21st May	Who needs fostering? We will highlight the need for more carers for children with SEN, sibling groups and teenagers across the UK. It's a great opportunity for services to discuss their specific requirements.	<u>Wimborne</u> Cloisters - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs	Share Fostering Network info Share Dorset specialist interviews/ videos Foster in Dorset Facebook Live – 2 Initial Call and Home Visit Check in on Facebook Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo/ Fiona Fiona Jo & Catherine Jo
Wednesday 22nd May	Local Focus	Latest Blog from Swanage FC Amanda <u>Swanage</u> Love Cake - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs	Share on Facebook Check in on Facebook	Jo/ Fiona Jo

			Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo
Thursday 23rd May	What to expect once approved – we will talk about the practicalities of having your first placement	<u>Bovington</u> The Hive - drop in session for enquirers and existing FCs	Share Fostering Network info Interview with newly approved carer Check in on Facebook Foster Friendly and placard photos	Jo/ Fiona Jo Jo Jo
Friday 24th May	Thank you to Foster Carers – although the campaign has a strong recruitment element it is obviously vital that the existing workforce of Foster Carers feels valued, so we'll be sharing pictures of thank you events and writing a thank you message.		Share Fostering Network info Foster in Dorset Facebook Live – 3. Application & Beyond Dorset 'Thank you' from CE and Director?	Jo/ Fiona Jo & Catherine Fiona
Saturday 25th/ Sunday 26th	Can I foster if – we will be sharing our <i>Can I foster if</i> short films on social media		Share Fostering Network info	Jo/ Fiona

PLUS – HALF TERM WEEK – after Foster Care Fortnight



24hr Sponsored Danceathon

Where: County Hall Dorchester

When: Wednesday 29th May from 09:30 through to Thursday 30th May at 09:30 (half term)

Why: To promote fostering in Dorset. To raise the profile of care leavers.
To raise money for 'Friends of Dorset Care Leavers'

The public can join us anytime between 10am and 5pm. We would love to see foster families and care leavers popping by for a boogie too. There will be a HUGE hokey cokey at 1pm outside County Hall on the grass - everybody welcome.

Keep an eye on us with Facebook Live and make a song request for a small donation.

With a dressing up box, hula hoops and dancing ribbons - we'll be ready for themed hours!

 Dorset Council
Foster in Dorset

 @FosterInDorset
@dorsetcareleavers

 @friends_of_DCL

