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1. Purpose of Report

This is a report to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council’s Foster Panel. It reports on the business of the panel and the fostering service in 2014-15, providing statistical information on its business from 01.04.2014 -31.03.2015. As well as reporting on the activity of the panel, including a brief summary of the work which is undertaken by the panel, it considers the feedback and monitoring completed by the panel and the quality of reports presented to it.

This report provides an opportunity for the panel, led by the panel chair, to reflect on the work of the panel and the fostering service in the reporting period and to respond, either challenging or commending practice where necessary. The fostering service will request a written response from the panel chair which will be shared with and considered by the Agency Decision Maker for fostering.

2. Introduction

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Foster Panel has the following primary functions (under Regulation 25(1) of the Fostering Regulations 2011):

1. It is to consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent (including “connected persons” under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement & Care Review Regulations 2010)

2. Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given

3. It is to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate - (i) on the first review and (ii) on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service (e.g. following allegations or complaints against foster carers)

• It matches children who have a plan for long-term fostering with suitable foster carers

The panel works within the Fostering Regulations 2011, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement & Case Review Regulations 2010 (and the Care Planning and Fostering Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2015).

3. Panel Composition

Regulation 23(1) states that “the fostering service must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel (“the central list”), including one or more social workers who have at least three years’ relevant post-qualifying experience.
Regulation 23(4) states that “…the fostering service must constitute one or more fostering panels, as necessary, to perform the functions of a fostering panel under these Regulations, and must appoint panel members including:

(i) a person to chair the panel who, in the case of any appointment made after 1st October 2011, must be independent of the fostering service provider, and

(ii) one or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the panel is absent
or that office is vacant ("the vice chairs") from the persons on the central list.

The panel manages its business in a professional and consistent manner with no significant skill gaps being identified by the panel or the service. This is regularly reviewed through individual Professional Development Reviews.

The central list has 15 members. These include an independent chairperson who is independent of the fostering service, two vice chairs from the children and young people’s service, a medical advisor (Dr Hashmi) and a legal advisor (who is available for written advice or consultation). In addition, the panel advisor attends each meeting but is not a member of the panel, social workers (with 3 years’ relevant post-qualifying experience) & independent members

The table below provides the details of the Central List as at 31.03.2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Panel Member</th>
<th>Type of Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fred Lillie</td>
<td>Independent Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Lancaster</td>
<td>Social work member (adoption service) and Vice-Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta Lyne</td>
<td>Social work member (fostering service) and Vice-Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June Watson</td>
<td>Independent Member (foster carer for Sheffield city council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Brothers</td>
<td>Independent Member (foster carer for Sheffield city council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Guest</td>
<td>Designated Nurse for Care Leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Holgate</td>
<td>Designated Nurse for Looked After Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine Litchfield</td>
<td>Virtual Head (education) for Looked After Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne Grice-Saddington</td>
<td>Social work member (manager of the Children’s Rights Service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Sharman</td>
<td>Elected member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Pickering</td>
<td>Elected member, subsequently independent member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amie Stead</td>
<td>Social work member (fostering service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Pickering</td>
<td>Social work member (fostering service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Padley</td>
<td>Social work member (adoption service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Thompson</td>
<td>Social work member (adoption service)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that the composition of the central list would benefit from:

- a young person with “care” experience, e.g. a care leaver
- a representative of the BME community
- a vice-chair (and members) of organisational seniority
- at least one elected member to attend each panel (Cllr Sharman has indicated that he is not seeking re-election in the May 2015 local elections.

**Panel Member Annual Performance and Development Reviews (PDR)**

All panel members are required to have an annual Performance and Development Review looking at their progress as panel members. This is a “rolling programme” throughout the year undertaken by the Panel Chair and supported by the Panel Adviser.

The previous Panel Chair, Paul Walton, was reviewed in 2014 but retired at the end of December 2014. The “new” Panel Chair, Fred Lillie, took up the post in February 2015; his PDR is yet to be arranged.

**4. Panel Training**

Panel training during the year has included safeguarding, the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the Education of looked after children.

**5. Fostering Panel and Quality Assurance of Work 2014-15**

The panel in its work considered the following written reports:

- Skills to Foster Applications
- “Connected Persons” (family & friends) Applications
- First Reviews of foster carers
- Reviews following allegations or complaints against foster carers
- Child and Family Permanence (long-term) Matching
• Changes in terms of approval of foster carers

The Panel Advisor receives the draft reports prior to panel and gives written feedback on the quality of the reports, where appropriate, as well as practice advice. The quality of Prospective Foster Carer Reports (including “connected persons”), 1st Reviews of carers and Reviews following an allegation or complaint is generally good. The “Front Sheet” was reviewed and revised during the year to clarify and summarise the information to aid the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker.

Throughout the period from 01.04.2014 to 31.04.2015, there have been numerous comments & views made by the Fostering Panel in relation to items presented:

• The quality of permanence (long-term) matching reports varied widely throughout the year; some were of a good standard and reflective of the reasons why a specific match meets the needs of a child or children, with good analysis provided and clear information about why the foster carers could meet the needs of a child; others were not considered to be “good”

• The following comments were made by the Fostering Panel that required development consideration: sometimes the matching reports failed to adequately identify risks (e.g. risk from family, risk of developing needs in the future): sometimes children’s needs were inadequately identified: sometimes insufficient information regarding the views of all concerned in the household (including the carers’ children) – these comments echoed issues of the previous year

• As a consequence of the continued comments, the report format was reviewed, revised and strengthened in two specific ways: some sections were incorporated together to avoid duplication: significant guidance was added to each section to ensure that the information and analysis required in the report was well-defined and unambiguous

• The outcome of this revised format has been that the quality of information provided to the Foster Panel by the matching report has generally improved

• In addition, managerial oversight in terms of quality assurance appeared to be absent or lacking in too many matching reports. Consequently, in relation to the “matching” of children with “in-house” foster carers, the Fostering Supervising Team Manager has spent a considerable amount of time undertaking quality assurance work to ensure that these reports are of sufficient quality to be submitted to the panel administrators

• However, the fostering team managers need to explore the “quality assurance” issue further (through advice, guidance, training and consultation) with children’s social workers and their team managers.

6. Fostering Panel Business 2014-15

Between 01.04.2014 & 31.03.2015, there were 22 Foster Panels convened. 137 agenda items were discussed, an average of 6.2 items per Panel.

The 3 tables below categorise these items; the 1st table relates to both Panels combined, the latter two for each individual Panel (nominally named Panel 1 and 2):
Of the 21 skills to foster reports presented to the Panel, 2 were additional assessment work for the Foster Plus scheme, another was an assessment of a registered foster carer & her “new” partner.

The Panel’s work is to be modified in the future; there is no statutory requirement for changes of carers’ terms of approval (i.e. approval category) to be presented to the Fostering Panel; following a carer review, these will be presented directly to the Agency Decision Maker; a number of de-registrations are “resignations” by carers – whilst it would be appropriate for some of these to be reviewed by the Panel in terms of the issues for the resignation, others are “straight forward”, (e.g. retirement); these take effect, in any event, after 28

### Panels 1 & 2 Combined (22 Sessions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda Item</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills to Foster Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 24 Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Carer Review</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change of Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>De-registration</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term Matching (In-house)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term Matching (IFA)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegations Report</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### Panel 1 (11 Sessions)

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<th>Agenda Item</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regulation 24 Assessment</td>
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<td>Regulation 24 extension</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1st Carer Review</td>
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<td>Change of Category</td>
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<tr>
<td>De-registration</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term Matching (In-house)</td>
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<td>Long-term Matching (IFA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allegations Report</td>
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### Panel 2 (11 Sessions)

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<th>Agenda Item</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Carer Review</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Category</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-registration</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term Matching (In-house)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term Matching (IFA)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegations Report</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
days of receipt of the resignation letter - the Panel will be notified of such situations.

7. Staffing in the Fostering Service

The in-house fostering service consists of 2 separate teams who are closely aligned – the Fostering Recruitment Team and the Fostering Supervision Team.

The **Fostering Recruitment Team** takes responsibility for the following:

- “Mainstream” Recruitment Activity - recruiting, training, assessing and approving prospective foster carers
- The Fostering Plus Specialist Fostering Scheme – this scheme was established during 2014/15 to recruit foster carers for adolescents with complex needs. Foster carers on the scheme have an enhanced wraparound support package including support from the Looked After and Adopted Children’s Therapeutic Team, and also receive an enhanced financial support package.
- The Families Together Scheme – this scheme offers short break foster care for disabled children (18 Families Together approved foster carers offer short breaks to a total of 29 non-looked after children)
- “Connected Persons” Foster Carers (also known as family and friends or kinship foster carers) – the team undertakes assessments of “connected persons” and provides the ongoing support and supervision to such carers (such carers in Rotherham are mostly made up of extended family members, often grandparents; at 31.03.2015, there were 16 children living such foster carers)
- Supported Lodgings Scheme (including “Staying Put” arrangements) – the scheme provides placements for care leavers, generally “staying put” with their current foster carers

The **Fostering Supervision Team** takes responsibility for the following:

- Support and supervision of all mainstream foster carers (not including Foster Plus and Families Together carers)
- Family finding and matching of children to placements
- Ongoing training and development of approved foster carers
The service’s workforce consists of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fostering Recruitment Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Worker</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Atkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne Cassidy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maureen Connolly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Dewick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry Donnellan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie Duffield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Harpham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberta Lyne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Nutton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amie Stead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Stickland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Symcox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fostering Supervision Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Worker</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadia Alam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue Arnold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne-Marie Banks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paul Baxter  Principal Practitioner (Supervising Worker)
Rhondda Davies  Principal Practitioner (Supervising Worker)
Michelle Dolman  Supervising Worker
Katie Fisher  Principal Practitioner (Supervising Worker)
Nicola Flanagan  Supervising Worker (starting in June 2015)
Yasmina Fynn  Supervising Worker
Dave Hey  Supervising Worker
Yvonne Howe  Supervising Worker (Permanence/Long-term Fostering) (starting in June 2015)
Lisa Ledger  Supervising Worker
Sue Pickering  Supervising Worker

Training for staff

- Amie Stead, Joanne Nutton and Carol Stickland are undertaking their final year at Sheffield University regarding the M.A. in Professional Practice; this will be completed in September 2015
- Sadia Alam has applied to complete the final year regarding the same course
- In 2015, Yasmina Fynn and Lisa Ledger began the newly established Post Graduate Diploma in Advanced Practice in Family Placement course run by Sheffield Hallam University and Leeds BAAF
- On 30.04.2014 and 04.12.2014, there were fostering service development days to review progress regarding the development plan and consider next steps; the latter day also included training regarding the electronic DBS process

8. Fostering Service Business 2014-15

Fostering Recruitment

Of particular concern was the significant drop in enquiries into fostering, especially from the time of the publication of the Jay Report. This decrease resulted in a net loss of foster carers during the year of 11 fostering households; there were 18 approvals and 29 de-registrations.
It is, however, worthy of note that there were 147 enquiries with an outcome of 18 approvals (some of which were “carried over” from the previous year); whilst this is not enough carers for the service to increase its sufficiency, it demonstrates a 12% “conversion rate” (i.e. enquiry to approval rate) – the national average conversion rate for last year was 11%.

The service undertook a great deal of work into improving the number of enquiries by increasing information events and publicity across the borough; indeed, as a consequence, 52 of the 147 enquiries in 2014-15 were made in the 3 months from January to March 2015 (in comparison, there were 38 enquiries in the 5 months from August to December 2014).

**In-house fostering provision (as at 31.03.2015)**

Regarding in-house fostering provision, there were:

- 132 mainstream approved foster carers
- 6 Foster Plus carers
- 18 Families Together (short breaks) carers
- 11 “Connected Persons” foster carers

**Fostering Supervision**

**Support groups**

- 2015 saw the introduction of 2 additional support groups; the service currently facilitates four groups:
  1. Induction year and newly approved foster carers support group (Unity Centre)
  2. North support group (Swinton Library) (afternoon)
  3. Central support group (Listerdale children’s centre) (morning)
  4. South support group (Dinnington resource centre) (evening).

- The groups are run on different days of the week and at different times of the day to provide carers with choices and options.

**Regarding training and development of foster carers during 2014-15:**

- There were 1013 training courses accessed by 286 carers
- These included taught courses and introductory DVD courses
- The most “popular” courses were:
  - CSE – Keep Them Safe (online course) = 96 carers
  - 1st Aid (taught course) = 67 carers
  - Record Keeping (DVD course) = 52
  - Understanding behaviour (DVD course) = 51 carers
  - Equality & Diversity (DVD course) = 50 carers
  - Safer Caring (DVD course) = 43 carers
This period also saw the introduction of training workshops being incorporated (where appropriate) into the support groups, for example, behaviour management training was facilitated by the supervising worker and presented to the North Support Group over three support group meetings (it was well received by carers). This is to be rolled out to each support group in 2015 – 2016

In addition, foster carers receive a great deal of support from the LAACST team and the Virtual School:

- The Looked After and Adopted Children’s Support and Therapeutic team provides a therapeutic consultation, support and intervention service to looked after and adopted children, their carers (e.g. foster carers or adopters), and professionals working with them, particularly regarding emotional wellbeing and attachment/early trauma issues. The team consists of a manager/clinical psychologist and four therapeutic intervention workers. Volunteers and students from courses in social work, clinical psychology and art therapy also make an important contribution to the team which provides a great deal of training for foster carers in relation to attachment and therapeutic parenting.

- The Virtual School, Rotherham, acts as a local authority champion to bring about improvements in the education of Rotherham’s Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It aims to promote their educational achievement as if they attended a single school. Looked After Children are entitled to and must have a high quality education - this is key to improving their life chances and future outcomes. The Virtual School does not exist in real terms - children do not attend it - they remain the responsibility of the school at which they are enrolled. The Virtual School works in close partnership with a wide range of agencies that includes schools, social care, Independent Reviewing Officers, foster carers and other services in order to promote educational achievement.

Fostering Celebrations

- **November 2014** saw the annual foster care celebration evening (held at Consort Suite) and well attended by foster carers; Jane Parfrement and Paul Dempsey attended and gave short speeches before a 3-course dinner and dance was enjoyed by all which ran into the night

- **November 2014** also saw the first Halloween fostering families fancy dress party at the Sunnyside Community Centre, which was decorated to the spirit of the event; children and adults alike enjoyed the disco, face painting, games and hauntingly fun activities

- **December 2014** saw the fostering Christmas Party; a disco, arts and craft activities, face painting, and raffle were held; after the fancy dress parade, the children were awarded a selection box and certificate for their involvement in the event. Santa dropped by with his little helper, bringing magic to the room as presents were given to all the children

- **February 2015** saw the foster carer long service award (held at the Town Hall) hosted by the Mayor and Mayoress; foster carers were presented with bouquets of flowers for long service of 25 years, 15 years and 10 years together with framed photographs to commemorate the event; an informal afternoon was enjoyed by carers and staff over refreshments and cake
• 22nd March 2015 saw fostering families “hopping” along to Sunnyside to enjoy Easter Celebrations with fancy dress, face painting, disco, Easter egg raffle and, after a fancy dress parade, awards to the children of certificates and Easter eggs.

9. Looked After Children Information 2014-15

Regarding the Looked After Children (LAC) population (in relation to fostering) as of 31.03.2015:

LAC Population:

• The total LAC population at 31.3.15 was 409 children. It had ranged from 390 to 409 between March 2011 and March 2015
• 50.6% of the children were aged 12-17 years, 24.9% were aged 6-11 years and 24.4% were aged 0-5 years
• More females were in care (231) than males (178)
• 20.3% children were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with the 15% black and ethnic minority population on Rotherham as a whole

Admissions to care:

• There were 175 admissions to care in 2014-15 (147 in 2013-14)
• 59 children aged 2 years and under were admitted (an increase of 14 children from 45 in 2013-14)
• 45 children aged 12-15 years were admitted (an increase of 13 children from 32 in 2013-14)
• 17 children aged 8-11 years were admitted (a decrease of 16 children from 33 in 2013-14)

Placement of LAC:

• 45% (182 children) of the whole LAC population were placed with in-house foster carers, compared to 41% (163) the previous year; 27% (111) were placed in independent fostering agency placements compared to 26% (102) in 2013-14
• Thus, there has been placement success during the past year. Whilst the number of fostering household decreased, there was an increase in the number of children being cared for (19 children) by RMBC foster carers
• There was significant improvement regarding permanence (long-term) foster placement stability; the percentage of looked after children who had been in care for 2.5 years and had been in the same placement for the previous two years increased from 68.8% in 2013-14 to 71.9% in 2014-15. This performance is in the top quartile for local authorities nationally
• More young people in foster care were enabled to benefit from Staying Put arrangements; these increased from 5 young people in 2013-14 to 13 young
people in 2014-15. All 8 young people in in-house foster care who turned 18 in 2014/15 remained beyond 18 with their foster carer in a Staying Put arrangement

10. Key Messages, Challenges, Targets and Actions

Key Messages

“The Voice of the Child” and the fostering service

RMBC’s Looked After Children Council was consulted in April 2015. The participating members included looked after children and care leavers (aged 16-22 years); they had experienced foster care, residential care, Staying Put arrangements and semi-independent care accommodation.

Key messages from the young people in terms of the fostering service included:

- There needs to be more in-house foster carers in Rotherham; one young person said: “we need more foster carers living in Rotherham…..it gives you more chance to see your family”; another said: “We should recruit more of our own foster carers and use less privatised carers”
- “Quality foster carers” need to be recruited; quotes included “We need the right kind of foster carer”: “You should do good assessments of foster carers”: “Recruitment can attract carers who just want the money”: “There shouldn’t be too many children in one home”: “Carers need to have good training to understand children’s mental health needs”

“The Voice of foster carers” and the fostering service

Foster carers say:

- It’s life changing!"
- You can make a difference!”
- It gives kids a second chance”
- When a child accepts you, you feel special”
- “Above all, we all work together to keep Rotherham children in Rotherham!”
- It’s the start of a great journey for you & the children & young people you may work with”

Key Challenges

However, there are key challenges for the fostering service in the coming years for which a sufficiency strategy is being devised to address:

- The Ofsted Inspection noted that “Looked after children do not receive good enough care and they wait too long for permanent homes. Too
many children and young people are placed out of the borough because there are not enough local placements”

- Too many children and young people are placed in residential placements; this needs to be decreased with an increase of family placements
- Too many children and young people are placed out of borough and at distance from their families and communities; these independent placements are, on average, at a much higher cost when compared with in-house provision
- In addition to the need to increase the number of in-house placements, it is also essential to increase the range of specialist in-house placements so as to provide sufficient provision of local parent and child placements, teenager placements and emergency placements

Gap Analysis

There is an insufficient number and range of in-house foster carers; the service needs more carers, in particular for sibling groups and children aged 10 years and above

- There is a need for carers able to take parent and child placements
- There is a need for or 2 remand foster carers
- There is a need for carers able to care for young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation
- The current carer pool cannot meet the complex needs of many of the adolescents requiring placements. Highly skilled and resilient foster carers who are able to work with a wraparound support team are needed so as to offer more young people a family based placement rather than a residential placement
- The carer pool needs to be more ethnically diverse to reflect the ethnicity of children requiring placements.

Strategy

The strategy over the next three years will consist of the following elements:

- Supporting children to stay at home with their birth parents or extended family members wherever this is possible
- Changing considerably the composition of placement types used to care for looked after children so that the vast majority of children are placed in foster families and less children and young people are placed in residential care, and more children and young people are placed in more cost efficient in-house placements
- Robustly managing the care population to ensure that children are moved to permanence placements in a timely fashion, both in and out of care
- Increasing local provision through growth in local in-house fostering provision and working with the independent sector so that less children are placed at a distance
- Boosting in-house wraparound placement support services to facilitate the placement of young people with multiple complex needs locally.
Targets and Actions

To meet the needs of Rotherham children and young people, the “carer pool” needs to increase by at least 60 carers over the next 3 years, i.e. a target of 20 carers each year:

- To increase the number of children cared for in in-house foster care also by 20 in each of the next 3 years
- This will require a “rebranding” of the Fostering Service and be a pro-active and innovative initiative to counter the negative press coverage of Children’s Social Care Services and the town over the last year
- Recruitment campaigns and activity will appeal to members of the public to be part of the ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of supporting and caring for our most vulnerable children, appealing to their sense of wanting to act on a moral imperative – their sense that they ‘must’ contribute as foster carers as it is the right thing to do; there will be a focus on the “sense of community” that foster carers value, i.e. that they can enable Rotherham children to remain in their local communities in Rotherham
- The rebranding will promote the concept of foster carers as “community heroes”
- To increase the Foster Plus specialist fostering scheme (established in 2014-15) so that it provides further placements for adolescents with challenging and complex needs, recruits at least one more “salaried” emergency carer to add to the one recently recruited, and recruits carers that can offer parent and child placements and accommodate young people on remand
- To develop the Child Sexual Exploitation Fostering Scheme across South Yorkshire alongside Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster Local Authorities. This initiative is supported by an Innovation Grant of £1.2m from the Department for Education and has a target to recruit 35 foster carers across South Yorkshire to provide local family based placements for young people at risk of or suffering from Child Sexual Exploitation
- To make use of the newly-established Permanence Fostering Social Worker to lead on securing permanent foster homes in a timely fashion for all children who need them
- To utilise the recently approved policy for funding home extensions for foster carers (and adopters) to increase capacity of existing carers where it allows for them to care for our most difficult to place children and where it allows for sibling groups to be placed together

Proposals

- To invest in a new Fostering Service website and develop and invest in a full online marketing campaign as a matter of urgency
- To increase the current fostering and adoption marketing officer post from 26 hours per week to 37, making it a full time post
- To establish a third team manager post in the Fostering Service. This is essential to support both the foster carer recruitment and supervision and retention functions in the Fostering Service and to ensure there is sufficient management capacity to accommodate the necessary growth in the service
- To review and revise the financial support package paid to foster carers to ensure that it is, as a minimum, competitive with the package paid by neighbouring local authorities and local independent fostering agencies.
Other Developments

- The recruitment team was a part of the Fostering Network’s review of their assessment materials and will be using the latest report formats when they become available in July 2015.
- The supervision team are to participate in a BAAF pilot (in partnership with Doncaster Children’s Trust, BAAF and the “Esmee Fairbairn Foundation” exploring current practice relating to information that is collated by foster carers; the aim is to inform BAAF “top tips” and best practice around life story work and sharing children’s narratives; focus groups for foster carers, fostering workers & children’s social workers are arranged for June 2015.
- The supervision team are also to lead on a consultation and confidence-building event for males 11-18 years of age, working in partnership with the Youth Service in June-July 2015, including outward-bound activities, Music, art and IT.
- A successful Innovation bid has resulted in a South Yorkshire project for CSE fostering; the 3 local authorities of Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham, together with Doncaster Children’s Trust are working in partnership to respond to the need for “CSE foster placements” in South Yorkshire; the project is to be managed from Sheffield with the 4 services recruiting, assessing and supervising such carers in their own geographic area; placements will be matched across the county.
- The fostering service is a “learning from feedback” service; this includes feedback reports from: carers attending the Fostering Panel: the Fostering Panel itself: journey mapping of applicants’ journey to become foster carers: complaints, allegations and compliments.
- The contribution of looked after children, carers’ own children and social workers to foster carers’ reviews will be collated into a quarterly report to inform future delivery of the service.

11. Summary

In summary, 2014-15 was a busy year for the Fostering Panel and the Fostering Service.

Regarding the Fostering Panel:

- Frequency of Panel Meetings and careful planning of agendas have ensured children’s plans for permanence are agreed in a timely manner to avoid any unnecessary delay from the Panel perspective.
- Recruitment of new panel members to the central list to fill vacancies has ensured panels are quorate and able to function appropriately.
- A new chair of the Panel, Fred Lillie, commenced in February 2015 following the retirement of the previous Chair, Paul Walton, in December 2014.
- Fred has initiated an Information Sheet so that the Panel receives all relevant information regarding the previous month; this includes: number of enquiries and assessments: number of looked after children and those placed with in-house carers & independent agencies (within and outside of the borough):
foster carer reviews (and the level of contribution by children and their social workers to the review)

- The Panel continues to ensure that it is a positive experience for everyone attending by providing a welcoming atmosphere, and support for (prospective) foster carers from either their assessing or supervising social worker; Fred has stated a willingness to attend support groups to introduce himself and discuss all matter relating to the Fostering Panel

Regarding the fostering service:

- Following a tough year for children’s services, the fostering service is looking forward to the next 12 months with optimism
- There is a need for more foster carers with a stated target of 20 additional carers for the next 12 months
- There is to be a fully-refreshed recruitment campaign with a new website as its “flagship”
- The recruitment team will use the new Skills to Foster report format when it is available
- The supervision team is to participate in the BAAF pilot and the partnership project with youth services
- The “CSE fostering project” (with a current working title of “Fostering Changes”) will becomes established
- The service is a “learning service” that is takes note of feedback

The Fostering Service invites the Fostering Panel Chair, on behalf of the panel, to comment on the work of the panel and the service as detailed in this report and to make any other comments relating to quality assurance and the performance of the service so that the service can take account of this in its future development.

Andrew Symcox
Fostering Recruitment Team Manager

Signed: Andrew J Symcox
Fostering Panel Advisor

Dated: 26.06.2015