ROtherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Children and Young People’s Services

6-Month Update Report
Rotherham Fostering Panel

April – Sept 2015
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☎: (01709) 822346  📧: e-mail  Minicom: 01709 823536
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1. Introduction

This report is a 6-month update (from April – September/October 2015) of the annual report of 2014-15

2. Panel Composition

The amendments to the Central List are as follows:

- Sandra Guest has retired from the health service
- Cllr Terry Sharman has retired as an elected member of the council
- Peter Douglas & Tina Hohn (virtual school) have joined & provide education representation together with Lorraine Dale (formerly Litchfield)
- Cllr Maureen Vines has joined as an elected member of the panel
- Lisa Padley (adoption service) is to resign as of December 2015

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

- a young person with “care” experience
- a vice-chair (and members) of organisational seniority

Panel Member Annual Performance and Development Reviews (PDR)

Since April 2015, the following panel members have had an annual Performance and Development Review looking at their progress as panel members:

- Karen Holgate (health representative)
- Amie Scaife (formerly Stead) (social worker)

3. Fostering Panel and Quality Assurance of Work 2014-15

The panel in its work has considered the following presentations:

- 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

From June 2015, there has been a panel audit of each item presented to the panel in 2 areas of work: the report provided by the worker(s): the presentation by the worker(s); this has included a “score” as follows:

- Score of 1 = Inadequate – requires significant improvement
- Score of 2 = Inadequate – requires moderate improvement
• Score of 3 = Good – requires minor improvement
• Score of 4 = Very good – high-level practice
• Score of 5 = Outstanding – best practice

An analysis of the audits show:

As regards the documentation/report provided to the Panel, there were:

• No score of 1
• 4 scores of 2
• 10 scores of 3
• 8 scores of 4
• No score of 5
• Average score = 3.2 (“good”)

As regards the presentations to the Panel:

• No score of 1
• 2 scores of 2
• 5 scores of 3
• 15 scores of 4
• 0 score of 5
• Average score = 3.6 (“good”)

Comments made by the Fostering Panel in relation to the reports provided and items presented:

• A number of reports were considered to be thorough
• Social workers (whether assessing applicants or supervising existing carers) were confident and knowledgeable about the applicants/carers
• It would be helpful for all Panel members to have the genograms (rather than in the portfolio of evidence) to assist their understanding of family relationships – this has been implemented
• In relation to carer reviews, the Panel advised that they would like carers’ terms of approval to be clear
• A Fostering Plus carer had provided a “our journey through fostering” which was highly praised; this document can be used for recruitment and retention purposes
• Assessing workers to record individual interviews clearly with applicants & referees; this was generally the case but reinforcement was implemented to ensure that the distinct was made when we received written references & when referees were interviewed
• Too many reviews did not include contributions from children’s social workers or the fostered children; although there has been some improvement in this, it continues to require monitoring (including by the Panel) to ensure full compliance as this is a safeguarding issue

4. Fostering Panel Business 2014-15

Between 01.04.2015 & 30.09.2015, there were 11 Foster Panels convened. 47 agenda items were discussed, an average of 4.3 items per Panel.
The table below categorises these items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panels 1 &amp; 2 Combined (11 Sessions)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agenda Item</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills to Foster Assessment</td>
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<td>Regulation 24 Assessment</td>
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<td>1st Carer Review</td>
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<td>Change of Category</td>
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<td>De-registration/Resignations</td>
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<td>Long-term Matching (In-house)</td>
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<td>Long-term Matching (IFA)</td>
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<td>Allegations Report</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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The Panel’s work was modified during this period of reporting in relation to “changes of carers’ terms of approval”; following a carer review, these are now presented directly to the Agency Decision Maker.

5. 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. There are no amendments to the teams since the annual report (2014-15) with the exception of Paul Dempsey (service manager, family placement & residential services) leaving the council as of 16.10.2015 to take up a senior post in Manchester. On 26.05.2015, Michelle Whiting commenced employment as Interim LAC Adviser to support improvements in fostering, adoption and looked after children’s services.

6. Fostering Service Business 2014-15

Fostering Recruitment

- There has been an increase in recruitment activity over the 6 months that bodes well for the remainder of the year
- There had been 6 new approvals and 2 de-registrations by the end of September 2015
- Between April and September 2015, there were enquiries into fostering and there are currently 20 assessments being undertaken
- There is no doubt that this is an insufficient increase to achieve our stated target of 20 new carers
- With the additional support of Michelle Whiting (Interim LAC adviser) and RMBC’s media team, the service has been able to achieve a new recruitment campaign, based on a theme of foster carers being “local heroes”; this theme came from foster carers themselves, from research that evidenced that: 62% of the population consider foster carers to be
“heroes”: 73% of foster carers (81% of new foster carers) have values relating to wanting to “make a difference, do the right thing at the right time, put something back into the community and help those who need help”; the campaign (and accompanying publicity materials) has been presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel, groups of foster carers and children’s service managers; feedback is extremely positive. The campaign will be rolled out across the borough and in specific “target areas” (Swinton/Kilnhurst, Thurcroft, North Anston and Heringthorpe/Stag) which have been identified by demographic research; this is backed by Cllr Gordon Watson and elected members, parish councillors and other key people in the 4 areas.

In-house fostering provision (as at 30.09.2015)

Regarding in-house fostering provision, there are:

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

Fostering Supervision

Support 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)
5. Foster carers’ own children’s support group (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.

The fostering service is participating in a “pilot project” with the FosterTalk organisation (and Cambridge University) to explore the impact on fostering households of unsubstantiated allegations against foster carers

Regarding training and development of foster carers between 01.04.2015 and 30.09.2015:

- There have been 670 training courses accessed by 238 carers
- These include taught courses and introductory DVD courses
- Examples of the courses completed by carers are:
  - e-PEP training = 80 carers
  - e-Safety = 25 carers
  - CSE – Keep Them Safe (online course) = 21 carers (96 carers completed this last year)
In addition, a further 15 carers have undertaken direct learning regarding CSE (e.g. Working Together to Safeguard Children & Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation)
- Understanding behaviour (DVD course) = 22 carers
- Equality & Diversity (DVD course) = 28 carers
- Therapeutic Parenting = 13 carers

In addition, a further 15 carers have completed the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers during this period.

Fostering Celebrations

- April 2015 – Easter Party for children and foster carers
- June 2015 – “Party in the Park” event as part of foster care fortnight
- July-August 2015 (school holidays) – 2 “Party in the Park” events for children and foster carers
- October 2015 – Halloween Party for children and foster carers
- The children’s support group have taken part in a range of activities including: visit to Yorkshire Wildlife Park: 10-pin bowling: clay making event: roller blading activity: music and drama activities: 2 swimming projects (specifically for looked after children who could not swim and were reticent to learn) – these culminated in a swimming event at Lake Windermere where the children participated in “open water swimming”

There is to be the annual foster carer celebration party at the end of November 2015 and the annual Christmas Party in December 2015

7. Looked After Children Information 2014-15

Regarding looked after children in relation to fostering (as of 30.09.2015):

- The total number of looked after children at 30.09.2015 was 414 children
- Of these. 303 were placed with foster carers, 200 with RMBC (“in-house”) foster carers; 103 with independent agency foster carers
- Thus, 48% of all looked after children were placed with in-house foster carers (a 3% increase from 31.03.2015, a 7% increase from 31.03.2014)
- Thus, there continues to be placement success over the last 6 months
- There continues to be a 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 has again increased in the last 6 months to 77.4% (from 68.8% in 2013-14 to 71.8% in 2014-15). This performance is in the top quartile for local authorities nationally
- There are currently 13 young who have remained with their foster carers after their 18th birthday (Staying Put arrangements) with plans for a further 11 to do so in the coming months.
8. Key Challenges, Targets and Actions

Key Challenges

There are key challenges for the fostering service in the coming years for which the sufficiency strategy is to address:

- Insufficient local placement availability, particularly for older children and sibling groups
- Too many children placed out of borough, on average, at a much higher cost
- There is a need for carers able to take parent and child placements
- There is a need for 1 or 2 PACE foster carers
- There is a need for carers able to care for young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation

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 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 has required a “rebranding” of the Fostering Service and a more pro-active and innovative recruitment campaign to enable children’s services as a whole to look to the future with optimism for the care of our vulnerable children; this rebranding is to promote the concept of foster carers as “local heroes”
- To further develop and implement the “Empower and Protect Programme” (the Child Sexual Exploitation Fostering Scheme across South Yorkshire) together with Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster, supported by the Department for Education
• 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

10. Summary

In summary, April-September 2015 has been busy for the Fostering Panel and 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 requested an information report so that the Panel received all relevant information regarding the previous month; this information is obtained and collated by the panel adviser and 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 with optimism
• More foster carers are required during the next 12 months (and beyond) for the local authority to achieve its sufficiency strategy targets (net gain of 20 carers per year over a 3-year period)
• The new recruitment campaign (with the new website as its “flagship”) on the “local hero” theme is to be formally launched on 10.11.2015
• 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”, the “Empower & Protect Programme” is becoming established across South Yorkshire
• 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 Adviser

Dated: 22.10.2015