

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 JUNE 2013

UPDATE ON MEDWAY'S FOSTERING SERVICES

Report from: Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults

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Summary

This report provides an update for members on the Fostering service. It provides information on recruitment activity during 2012-13 and activity planned over the forthcoming year.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The terms of reference for this committee are detailed within Chapter 4, paragraph 22.2(b) of the agenda and includes 'fostering and adoption and family placements'.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Ofsted inspection of Medway's Fostering service took place in August 2012, the findings from which were published in September 2012. The overall judgment for the service was adequate, although outcomes for children and the safeguarding of children were judged to be good.
- 2.2 The service undertakes a range of work to support the rest of Children's services and to promote positive outcomes for young people. The team recruits, assesses and supports foster carers who take looked after young people of all ages and with a range of needs. It's Fostering + service is designed to work with partner agencies (Health and Education) to support the most challenging young people. In addition it undertakes assessments and support on "Connected Carers"; family members or other significant adults who have indicated a desire to have a looked after young person live with them. The team also assesses and supports private foster carers and undertakes awareness raising campaigns in relation to the requirements around this role. The service also recruits, supports and provides Link carers who offer short break respite care to disabled children.

3. Team Activity 2012-13

3.1 The table below documents team recruitment activity during 2012-13.

Application packs, sent by post and email following initial contact:	
Generic carers	168
Respite carers	3
Link carers	0
Total	171
Households attending information evenings about fostering:	23
Initial visits undertaken following information evenings:	
Generic and respite carers	14
Households undergoing Form F assessment process in March 2013:	
Generic carers	12
Households undergoing Form C assessment process in March 2013:	
Connected Carers	13
Foster Carers approved as adopters:	3
Households withdrawing from the assessment process:	
Generic carers	22
Fostering Households approved:	
Generic carers	11
Respite carers	2
Connected carers	4
Link carers	0
Total	17
Termination of Approvals:	
Generic carers	7
Respite carers	1
Link carers	1
Total	9
Private Fostering:	
Currently 14 young people supported in private fostering arrangements. 18 assessments were completed last year.	

Note; the seeming discrepancy between the figures for numbers of carers approved (17) during 2012-3 and the number undergoing assessments in March 2013 reflects the fact that recruitment is undertaken at different times during the year and assessments proceed at different rates for a variety of reasons.

4. Current Fostering Activity

- 4.1 Currently 52.2% of Medway looked after young people are placed with in-house foster carers and 15.7% are placed with independent providers.
- 4.2 Of the total of young people in foster care 37.1% are placed outside of the Medway area but only 14.7% of these young people are placed more than 20 miles away.
- 4.3 There have been 3 “skills to foster” groups held between March and May 2013 and they will be held (if there are sufficient applicants) every month throughout the year apart from August and December.
- 4.4 Carers views regarding fostering and the support they receive are sought during their annual reviews. Thus far 10 responses have been received. All the feedback was positive regarding support for themselves and the children placed with them, though one carer stated that they had to seek support when their supervising social worker was off long term sick. We have reviewed this and will ensure back up link workers are allocate should this be a problem in the future.
- 4.5 Since January 2013 33 young people have responded to our feedback questionnaires relating to their experiences in foster care. 100% of the responses were positive. Young people are asked a range of questions including about their bedrooms, whether they get on with their carers, other children in placement and if they know who to talk to if they have a problem. Responses range from:

“I love living with J and S; they are a really nice family and I now regard this as my home”

“I consider R more than my carer”

5. 2013-14 Priorities

5.1 Recruitment Plan:

Activity	Frequency	Lead	Comments
Bus advertising	Commences 10 th June for 4 weeks. To be repeated throughout the year.	Comm's and fostering team manager	Provides increased awareness of Medway fostering services
On line campaigns including Medway intranet and Council internet site	Commenced May and will be ongoing throughout the year.	Comm's and fostering manager	Google keyword searches to be set up to draw people on the internet into the Medway fostering and adoption sites

Radio advertising.	Campaigns to start from July	Comm's and fostering manager	Campaigns to take various forms and will continue throughout the year
Newspaper campaigns	Quarter page advert in Kent Messenger w/c 28 th May and then monthly thereafter. Quarter page advert in Kent Family paper. Monthly advertising in Medway Messenger.	Comm's and fostering manager	Newspaper campaigns are being reviewed to include where possible, carers, their children and young people themselves and possibly staff.
Stalls and promotional activity at the Mela and other Medway events.	As appropriate and depending on the event.	Comm's and fostering manager.	Stalls have been held during foster care fortnight at the Hemstead Valley and Paragon shopping centers.
Develop and formalise our feedback systems from young people, foster carers and their children ensuring this is reported formally to CSCMT and utilised creatively in future promotional campaigns.	Quarterly feedback.	Fostering Manager	New feedback form for applicants following panel has been designed and will be used from June.

- 5.2 Fostering allowances have been increased for Medway foster carers in line with national guidance with effect from 01.04.13.
- 5.3 A £500 "finders" allowance has been offered to all current carers who recommend someone, who following the usual assessment process is subsequently approved as a carer.
- 5.4 The Fostering + service is being reviewed (as described above). In order to be fully effective and work with some of the most damaged and challenging young people, carers on this scheme need to be able to access immediate and skilled psychological and education based support in order to support and maintain their placements. The review will thus engage with colleagues across the Council and partner agencies to ensure that we offer a holistic approach to the service.
- 5.5 We are recruiting an interim post (for 6 months) to support service development across a range of areas including: the development of "Foster to

adopt” provision, developing tracking systems and ensuring all fostering policies reflect changes to legislation and good practice standards.

- 5.6 A new framework for monitoring a range of permanence options for young people (including long term fostering, a residence order or special guardianship order or adoption) will be introduced across Children’s services from 01.07.1. This will include the active recruitment of permanent foster carers for children where this has been agreed as their care plan.
- 5.7 We are exploring how we can increase the pool of available foster carers by reducing the time taken for their assessments to 6 months.

6. Risk management

- 6.1 The risk management matrix below identifies any risks involved in the development of the fostering service as described and sets out how the service will mitigate against such risks.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Failure to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet the demands of Medway looked after children population.	The cost of independent fostering placements will increase.	Recruitment strategy to be in place by 10.06.13. The strategy will address both location of carers and skills base needed for carers in order to reduce reliance on independent providers.	Medium
Failure to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet the demands of Medway looked after children population	Young people may be placed at some distance from the Medway area, thus impacting on our ability to work closely with them and their ability to retain positive local contacts, e.g. family, school friends etc.	Recruitment strategy to be in place by 10.06.13. Strategy will address both location of carers and skills base needed for carers in order to reduce reliance on independent providers.	Medium
Annual foster carer reviews which are chaired within the team do not allow for and demonstrate sufficient independence and challenge.	Poor practice by carers or lack of appropriate management and support within the fostering service continues which will impact negatively on the service provided to looked after young people,	SM LAC to review with Children’s Service Management Team who else will be tasked with chairing annual reviews.	Medium

Insufficient services are available to support and develop the Fostering + service.	Foster carers on this scheme are unable to work with young people with very challenging behaviours which will in turn increase our reliance on independent fostering providers.	SM LAC to liase with colleagues and partner agencies to improve and develop support available to the service.	Medium
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7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 Failure to secure more in-house placements able to work with challenging young people will place further pressure on placement budgets.
- 7.2 The unit cost of an in-house fostering placement is approximately £400, per week whilst the average cost of an independent placement is £911 per week with a range between £800 and £1300 per week depending on the type of placement and age/needs of the child. Improving the number of in house placements will thus have a significant impact on our expenditure over the coming year.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note this 6 month update report and the actions described therein to increase the availability of in house foster carers and to develop and expand the service.

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Background papers

None