

Decision Maker: **CARE SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date: **Tuesday 12 March 2013**

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: **2012/13 ANNUAL REPORT OF FOSTERING SERVICE**

Contact Officer: Kay Weiss, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Social Care
E-mail: kay.weiss@bromley.gov.uk

Ian Leadbetter, Head of Social Care, Care and Resources
E-mail: ian.leadbetter@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Executive Director of Education & Care Services

Ward: (All Wards);

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 requires the Fostering Agency to produce a report on fostering activity to the Agency Executive and an updated Statement of Purpose on an annual basis.
- 1.2 This report presents to the Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee details of activity from 1 April 2012 to date, together with the updated Statement of Purpose (Appendix 1).
-

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 The Care Services Policy, Development and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- i. Consider the content and comment upon the report and revised Statement of Purpose.
 - ii. Recommend that the report and revised Statement of Purpose be agreed by the Care Services Portfolio Holder.
 - iii. Recommend to the Portfolio Holder that, in future, the annual report will be presented to the Care Services PDS with interim reports being presented to the Executive Working Party for Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting on a six monthly basis. This will bring the process in line with similar arrangements already in place for the Adoption Service report.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People:
-

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost:
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Budget head/performance centre: 833120
 4. Total current budget for this head: £4,623,910
 5. Source of funding: Base budget
-

Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 17 FTE (plus 128 fostering units)
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
 2. Call-in: Applicable:
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): N/A
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards require all fostering services to provide an annual review and a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and facilities provided.
- 3.2 In addition, Standard 25.7 of the National Minimum Standards 2011 requires the Fostering Agency to produce a report on fostering activity to the Agency Executive, to:
- Receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency;
 - Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
 - Satisfy itself that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.
- 3.3 The Bromley Fostering Service Statement of Purpose reflects the Council's corporate priorities and strives to ensure that there are sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of our children and young people.

4. PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 The Fostering Service primarily provides a service for looked after children. The service is committed to identifying and supporting stable placements for children and young people where foster care is the identified plan.
- 4.2 As of the 31 January 2013 we had 294 looked after children of which 69.2% are placed with in-house foster carers; an increase from 67.8% in 2011/12. 15.4% are placed with connected persons foster carers; an increase from 10.3% in 2011/12.
- 4.3 Since 1 April 2012 there have been 100 new placements. Of these 68% are placed with in-house foster carers.
- 4.4 The service provides a range of placements including emergency placements, short term and bridging placements, long term care and short breaks.
- 4.5 As of the 31 January 2013, Bromley had 128 foster carer units; an increase from 114 in April 2012. This represents a net increase of 14 fostering units. To put this in context the net increase of fostering units for the period 2010 – 2012 was two units. The number of newly approved connected persons foster included in the above figure is two units.
- 4.6 Placement stability is a key indicator for looked after children and can be used to investigate reasons why children and young people cannot be cared for within particular foster placements. The percentage of children and young people who have experienced three or more placement moves currently stands at 11.56%. This is an improvement from 15.60% in 2011/12.
- 4.7 From the 1 April 2012, 23 new fostering units have been approved and nine fostering units have been de-registered. Deregistration occurs for a variety of reasons and, looking at past figures, this year's performance is not considered unusually high. Five connected person foster carers have been deregistered since April 2012. Connected person foster carers are approved only for a named child or young person. In each of these cases the young person being cared for had reached the age of 18. No carer has been deregistered for either a safeguarding or quality of care reason.

- 4.8 There are currently 11 Form F assessments of new foster carers allocated within the team at varying stages of completion and a waiting list of five potential fostering units waiting to proceed to a 'skills to foster' course. The average time for a Form F assessment to be completed from formal application is eight months against a target of six months.
- 4.9 From 1st April we have received 82 initial enquiries about fostering for Bromley. 31 of these were rejected at the initial discussion stage with the applicant either due the applicant not meeting the minimum requirements (i.e. bedroom availability or age criteria) or that the applicant decided not to proceed after discussion.
- 4.10 A further 13 were rejected at the initial visit stage due to a variety of reasons including self rejection following discussions with the visiting social worker. It is interesting to note that from the rejections a number of applicants felt that the assessment process was too intrusive into their family life.
- 4.11 To date, 25 families have been put forward for the 'skills to foster course of which eight passed, three failed and five withdrew or failed to attend. The remaining 9 families are booked on the courses which are due to take place in February and March 2013.

5. RECRUITMENT ACTIVITY

- 5.1 The service has continued to actively advertise for foster carers. This has included a specific campaign targeted at carers for disabled children and adolescents to coincide with the fostering fortnight in May 2012, a till receipt campaign with a local supermarket during December 2012, advertising in a fostering feature being conducted by the News Shopper in January 2013 and work is currently underway to promote looked after children and fostering in an article to be published by the News Shopper in February/March this year.
- 5.2 Despite this activity there is no indication that these campaigns have had any significant impact and in particular the response to the advertisement for carers for disabled children and adolescents was extremely poor. We continue to work with the communications team to market fostering in Bromley.

6. ALLOWANCES

- 6.1 Members will be aware that we overhauled our fostering allowance scheme and introduced a revised scheme in August 2012. This followed a lengthy period of consultation with our carers together with bench marking against other local authorities.
- 6.2 Our new simplified scheme remains extremely competitive to neighbouring authorities and in some cases match allowances paid by IFA providers.
- 6.3 To date, we have only had two fostering units that have decided to cease working with Bromley and move to another fostering provider (one of which announced their intention to move prior to the introduction of the new payment scheme). It is therefore encouraging that the new allowance scheme has not had a negative impact on our foster carers.

7. FOSTERING PANEL AND AGENCY DECISION MAKER

- 7.1 The Fostering Panel sat twelve times in the period 1st April, 2012 to 31st January, 2013.
- 7.2 The fostering panel is responsible for making recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker as to the suitability of applicants to become foster carers and any conditions that should be attached to their approval.

- 7.3 In addition, the fostering panel also makes recommendations in relation to the long term matching of children to their foster carers and formally reviews all foster carers after their first year from approval and every three years subsequently.
- 7.4 The Agency Decision Maker is Kay Weiss, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care. In compliance with the National Minimum Standards the fostering panel recommendations have been considered and ratified within the prescribed timescales.

8. FOSTERING SERVICE MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 In 2012 Officers undertook a review of the structure of the adoption and fostering teams partly as a result of the need to identify efficiencies within the care and resources portfolio. As a consequence, the management arrangements for the fostering and adoption teams were reduced from 2 FTE Group Manager posts to 1 FTE Group Manager post covering both adoption and fostering teams in a family placements service..
- 8.2 After a significant period of interim management arrangements for both the fostering and adoption teams we were able to appoint an experienced manager to our newly combined family placements service. Our new group manager commenced employment with the authority on the 11 February.
- 8.3 In addition, we have been successful in appointing a new deputy group manager who will be responsible for the assessment function of the adoption element of the new service and we will soon be seeking to appoint a new deputy group manager for post adoption support. These new staff, together with relatively new appointments to the deputy group manager posts in the fostering service, will provide a robust and cohesive leadership team to drive forward improvements. This is significant as it is the first time in over three years that a full complement of managers has been in post.

9. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- 9.2 In September 2012 we commissioned a piece of work to help us frame an enhanced fostering package to meet the needs of some of our more complex and challenging children and young people and reduce the need for IFA and residential placements. This work has now concluded and we will be actively implementing a fostering improvement plan over the coming months.
- 9.3 We have started a review of our core and specialist training for foster carers and plan to introduce a foster carers "training passport", which will include an audit of training needs followed by a comprehensive training programme. Responsibility for coordinating training for carers has been transferred to the learning and development team who are well placed to more effectively co-ordinate the training programme. An improvement on our previous arrangements. We have actively promoted the necessary courses and support for foster carers to complete the requirements of the TSD programme which foster carers are required to complete within their first twelve months from approval. We are on line to ensure 100% compliance with this requirement.
- 9.4 We are currently also developing a website for our foster carers that will enhance communication as well as contain links to the foster carer handbook, policies and procedures, and contact details for support organisations. The website will also provide links to our recruitment pages and application process further increasing our exposure to potential foster carers.
- 9.5 In addition, we are continuing to actively recruit at least 20 new carers a year both to replace carers that have decided to retire from fostering and to meet the needs of children and young people requiring placements.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The production of an annual report and updated statement of purpose is a statutory requirement in The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Policy Implications Financial Implications Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	