

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL

1 SEPTEMBER 2016

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

### Report of the Director for People

Strategic Aim:	This report relates to the Council strategic objective two: "protecting vulnerable communities" and also to the Council's role as corporate parent for looked after children.	
Exempt Information	No.	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Councillor Richard Foster, Lead Member for Children	
Contact Officer(s):	Steve Tanner, Interim Head of Service, Safeguarding	Tel: 01572 758358 STanner@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	N/A	

### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel:

1. Note the annual fostering report for 2015/16 and agree the priorities for the service set out in pages 12 and 13 of the annual report.
2. Note the recruitment priorities for the fostering service in relation to adolescents, children with challenging needs/behaviours, and sibling groups.
3. Support the work taking place with corporate services to recruit more foster carers, improve the Council's web pages, and the use of Mosaic to support targeted recruitment of foster carers.
4. Note the lack of firm interest in co-delivering our fostering service by other authorities and organisations and the limited resilience of the service when faced with management shortages, and note that managers are reviewing how the service can be managed in the light of this.
5. Note that the performance of the fostering service in meeting some statutory timescales for the assessment, supervisory visiting, and review of in-house foster carers was adversely affected by a significant reduction in capacity in the team at a key point during 2015/16.
6. Note the need to update the sufficiency plan in relation to placements for looked after children, which details needs, demands, and commissioning priorities in the light of increased demand.

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Approved and regulated foster care providers (which includes local authorities) are required under statutory guidance (national minimum standards for fostering) to produce an annual report on its activities.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 2.1 There are currently 24 foster carers: 9 Connected Persons (friends and family) carers and 15 mainstream foster carers. Rutland recruited one couple as mainstream carers and 5 sets of connected people/friends and family carers over the period April 2015 to March 2016. The service did not meet its stated objective of recruiting two mainstream carers in the period in part because of the lack of response to recruitment initiatives and because of gaps in management and social work capacity at various points during 2015/16. As a result of this we now have a further programme of recruitment that is being developed and refined in conjunction with corporate colleagues.
- 2.2 During 2015/16 there was a significant increase in the number of looked after children, peaking at 40 children in March 2016 from a baseline historical average of 32. This placed considerable demands on the in-house service which has not been able to meet this demand within the in-house resource, resulting in an increase in the use of more costly private fostering agency placements.
- 2.3 The recruitment priorities for the fostering service continue to be carers for adolescents, children with challenging needs/behaviours (such as children who target other children in the family, show aggressive or destructive behaviours, or have severe learning disabilities) and sibling groups.
- 2.4 The fostering service has not consistently met statutory timescales for the assessment, supervisory visiting, and review of in-house foster carers as a result of the team being severely depleted. The permanent establishment of the fostering service consists of a principal social worker (FT), a fostering social worker (Full time), a 10 hour sessional social worker undertaking recruitment and assessments of prospective carers, and a connected person's social worker (Part time). At one point in the year the principal social worker was off sick and there was a social work vacancy i.e. capacity was reduced by over 70%. Efforts were made to plug this gap by reallocating work wherever possible to other staff and by utilising agency staff. However, the time taken to recruit to these posts and the shortage of specialist social workers and managers in this area meant some annual review timescales were missed for a period during the financial year. Performance improved during the last quarter of 2015/16 and was at 100% in the first quarter of 2016/17.
- 2.5 Savings were made in 2014/15 from the management base budget for this service. In the light of this, SMT agreed when it considered last year's report that the People's Directorate should review future delivery options for the in-house fostering service and make recommendations as to how this service might be

better delivered in future to provide improved outcomes and placement choice for Rutland looked after children as well as better value for money.

- 2.6 Delivery partnerships with other local authorities and the independent sector have been explored, and with the exception of one authority, no other local authorities or fostering agencies have expressed a firm interest in co-delivery of the fostering service in Rutland. In the light of this, other internal management arrangements are being considered.
- 2.7 The priorities for the service are set out in pages 12 and 13 of the annual report. Regulations do not require the annual report of the fostering service to comment on outcomes for children. The requirement of the annual report is to assess and report on compliance with statutory regulations and national minimum standards for the fostering service.
- 2.8 The regulations cover different types of providers – private sector, voluntary sector, as well as local authority fostering services all of whom have different statement of purposes which make it difficult to comment on outcomes in a meaningful way. Moreover, whilst we can and do celebrate the contribution of individual carers to improving outcomes for individual children, the in-house fostering service only looks after 60% of the children who are looked after by Rutland County Council so it is difficult to discern the overall contribution of the in-house service from other providers, especially when children may have different specialist needs.
- 2.9 However, what we can report on is the contribution of the in-house fostering service to overall outcomes to our looked after children which include:
- Extraordinary levels of placement stability – over 80% of our children living in the same placement for over 2 years and only one child out of 40 experienced 3 placement moves last year
  - Excellent educational attainment (as good as or better than their peers at most key stages) with personal education plans being completed more frequently than is required. Some of our care leavers have achieved very good degrees during the year.
  - All LAC reviews completed on time with children and young people actively contributing to their reviews.
  - Most annual health reviews (94%) were completed. Those that were not undertaken were largely teenagers who choose not to have one.
  - Undertaking positive activities and not getting involved in criminal activities – most children in care have not offended, and no child in care committed a second or subsequent offence in 2015/16.
- 2.10 There are some outcome areas we need to improve on. This includes:
- Ensuring better access to dental services.

- Ensuring initial health assessments are always undertaken within 28 days of coming into care. This has been particularly challenging when children live outside of Rutland and outside the CCG area.
- Ensuring those children and young people in care have timely access to appropriate mental health services thereby improving their emotional wellbeing, particularly those placed outside the CCG area.
- Increasing the availability of local placements where they are needed. Nearly two thirds of children are placed outside of Rutland. Whilst most of these are entirely appropriate, mainly because they are being looked after by connected persons, a few children were placed outside the county because no appropriate placement was available at the time the placement was made.

### **3. CONSULTATION**

3.1 None.

### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

4.1 None.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The fostering service, including staffing costs, equipment, and fees and allowances paid to carers to meet the expenses associated with caring for children, costs the Council approximately £1.1m per annum to run.

5.2 A successful in-house fostering service, able to meet the needs of all children in the care of Rutland County Council, is more cost effective than other placement options such as independent fostering agencies or residential care. It is critical, therefore, that the fostering service is closely monitored and evaluated to ensure those able to respond to local placement demands and the changing needs of children in care. This has been a key focus of the corporate parenting board.

5.3 Some additional funding may be necessary in due course to support the recruitment of foster carers for children who might otherwise be placed in more expensive placement options.

### **6. LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The local authority has a statutory duty to provide sufficient placements for looked after children, part of which is a sufficiency strategy which details needs, demands, and commissioning priorities.

### **7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has not been completed because there are no equality implications arising from the production of the annual report. The report highlights the need for the Council to recruit more carers from diverse backgrounds.

## **8 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None

## **9 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 None

## **10 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 The recommendations pull out the key issues arising from the content of the annual report and are set out at the beginning of the report.

## **11 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1 None.

## **12 APPENDICES**

- 12.1 Appendix A – The fostering annual report (attached).

**A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.**