



Southend Fostering Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2

Welcome from Southend Fostering Service

Introduction

I am pleased to present to you Southend Fostering service Annual Report for 2016. This has been a mixed year for Southend Fostering Service, with an increase in the number of carers gradually being recruited. We have had challenges with staffing for most of the year

The Southend Foster Families Community (previously council) and the Fostering Team have worked hard again this year to arrange a number of social events for carers and Looked after Children in their care. The team recognised the hard work and commitment of our carers with the annual long service awards for foster carers in September 2016. For 2017 we remain committed to building on the successes of the past few years. We look forward to developing the service with the new edge of care team offering addition 7 day a week support where placements are at risk or where older young people are on the

Our ethos

The core of what we do continues to be to strive to provide opportunities for children and young people to thrive in foster care, whether for a few days or for a few years and to find safe, high quality adoptive placements where this is required for children who cannot return to their birth families.

I am pleased to say that throughout 2016, placement stability in foster care has generally continued to improve and the fostering team have worked hard at putting in support to placements to help this be maintained.

Carers have shown a real commitment to supporting Southend children and ensuring they have the best possible opportunities and many carers who are now approaching Southend are doing so because of the positive things that they have heard from our carers.

Southend Fostering Service

Purpose of this report

The provision, standard and operations of the Fostering Service are governed by:

- The Local Authority Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011(updated 2013)
- Out of Authority – Placement of LAC Guidance (2014)
- Fostering minimum Standards 2011 and the
- Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 4, 2011

The Executive side of the council has a responsibility to monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users and that they are satisfied that the service is complying with the conditions of registration.

The aim of this report is to provide the information required to enable the Executive side of the Council to fulfil its duties in this respect and builds on the quarterly reports shared with the portfolio holder.

Overview

2016 has been a mixed year with some good success whilst managing some challenges with staffing and an increase in demand through family connected persons placements. The number of assessments for this type of family placement increased in 2016 from 7 the previous year to over 37 in 2016.

Diane Keens continues as Group Manager for Placements & Resources and to be the registered manager for the service. Emmet Perry continues as Team Manager, supporting staff to fully implement the many changes.

Recruitment plans have been put into place, which have shown an increase in interest. We have been particularly successful in gaining interest from already established carers from other agencies who through word of mouth have asked to join Southend.

There are now 8 fostering households on the Southend Fostering Project, able to offer 24 placements to some of our most challenging young people. Due to staying put legislation there has been some blockage with these placements as young people turn 18 years but wish rightly so to remain within their placements.

The Project has enabled us to continue to compete with private agencies and to recruit some very experienced carers.

The aim of the Southend Fostering Project is to ensure we develop a team of highly skilled, experienced and dedicated foster carers who will ultimately reduce the high cost of agency placements and ensure the best possible care for our most vulnerable and difficult to place children in the area in which they live.

The Fostering Project has enabled us to place a number of young people who otherwise would likely have been placed within the private sector due to their complex needs. This has enabled us to keep the young people close to their families and support networks and to offer a high level of support.

We have been able to develop further our numbers of fee paid carers, who are shown to be the most flexible provision for us to offer high quality placements for a wide variety of young people.

Statistics for past twelve months

There has been an increase in the number of children Looked after, over the past 18 months. The needs of many of these young people have been assessed as complex, which has led to a slight increase in the number of residential placements requested. The number of young people placed with relatives under connected person's placements has also increased which has had a further impact on the fostering service capacity.

(October 2015-Sept 2016)

- Number of fostering Households approved - **8** *(14 in 2015)*
- Number of fostering households as at 31st September 2016 - **102** *(94 in 2015)*
- New Family & Friends carers - **9** (plus 37 children under connected persons against 10 the previous year)
- Number of information packs sent - **149**
- How many children were placed with in house foster carers at 31st September 2016 *(rather than placed in a PVI placement)*- **199** *(151 in 2015)* Including 37 in connected persons placements) (73% against 60% on 2015)
- How many young people over 18 remained in foster care *(using our staying put policy where a young person can remain in their foster placement until the age of 21)* – **36** *(28 in 2015)*

Recruitment; training and assessment

It is the aim of Southend Fostering Service to have sufficient suitable placements to enable all Southend children who require foster care to be placed with its own carers, local to their families and friends. The service has this year through its advertising strategies, continued to receive an increased number of people enquiring about fostering. We have continued to develop alternative methods of recruitment

to revitalise our programme such as through the use of social media sites and now have an active Facebook page. We continue to use proven methods such as bus back advertising and radio as well as attending a number of local events and activities. We have this year again combined several fostering and adoption events which have proven very successful and we are looking at continuing this in the coming year.

During 2016 we ran 4 Skills to Foster training programmes involving 17 households.

From this, 12 households who continued to full assessment: 9 Foster carers and Friends and Family carers were approved to 31st September 2016 (37 assessments were completed but many moved to SGO prior to approval at panel), 5 Households are currently being assessed.

The number of beds available has increased further to 186 plus 37 connected persons. We currently have 122 (108 in 2015) Fostering Households (including connected persons).

The team have completed 30 kinship assessments in the past year which have subsequently gone to SGO placements (8 in the previous 12 months).

Fostering Panel

Between October 2015 and September 2016 we have run 11 (*13 in 2015*) panels. The following statistics are available from their work:

- Form F's presented (general approval): 8 (*14 in 2015*)
- Form F's presented (for a specific child): 9 (*plus 20 currently under connected persons*)
- Children presented to long term linking panel: 10 (*7 in 2015*)
- Household Reviews presented to panel: 13
(*Annual reviews are only presented to panel after the first year*)
- Carers approval terminated (due to concerns) 1 (*1 in 2015*)
- Carers' approval terminated (retirement and resignation.) 5 (*9 in 2015*)

Activities since January 2016

The fostering service has continued to offer a range of activities including ones which are fund raising; celebratory and as an opportunity for foster families to meet. Since

January 2016, Southend Fostering Service has coordinated and supported the following activities in conjunction with the Southend Foster Families Community:

02/01/2016 – 100 children and foster carers attended the Pantomime with subsidised tickets

16/02/2016 – 13 children attended Roller City

06/04/2016 – 20 children attended Kids Kingdom

21/05/2016 – 67 children and foster carers attended the Foster Care Fortnight Party

29/05/2016 – 35 children and carers attended the Beach Hut Picnic

10/08/2016 – 20 children attended Kids Kingdom

25/08/2016 – 16 children attended the Teddy Bears Picnic

26/10/2016 – 47 children and carers attended the Sons and Daughters party

Monthly coffee mornings / support group well attended throughout the year

Beach hut fully booked and used regularly – Profit £326.00

Cash 4 Clothes - Profit - £400.00

Raffles - Profit - £90

Donations from foster carers - Profit - £200

During the last year, the Beach Hut was fully booked during all school holidays, weekends and used regularly during the week. It was available throughout this summer for all and has been used more recently for some contacts between Looked after Children and their birth families.

SFFC had a full Events Plan booked for this year which included Foster Care Fortnight and all activities were for both birth children and looked after children. They have continued to fund raise on a regular basis and use The Support Group / Coffee Morning for recruitment, training, raising funds and awareness.

In September 2016 the Carers Long Service awards took place attended by; The worshipful the Mayor, the Portfolio Holder Cllr Courtenay; members of the Corporate Parenting Group; Director for People, Simon Leftley and the Head of Service, John O'Loughlin. This was an event to highlight the excellent work and commitment shown by Southend Carers held at Porters and was thoroughly enjoyed by all carers.

The Virtual Head Teacher

Southend Virtual School

The Virtual School acts as a local authority champion to ensure Children in Care and Young Care Leavers of Southend Borough Council receive the best possible education. The Virtual School acts as the central site where all our Children Looked After are monitored and supported through a multi-agency approach. The Virtual School is the first point of contact for all aspects of support and challenge relating to young people's educational outcomes. The Virtual School also has responsibility for Electively Home Educated young people and Young Carers.

The Virtual School's approach is to work with looked after children as if they were in a single school, liaising with the schools they attend, tracking the progress they make, monitoring their attendance and supporting their carers to help them achieve the best possible outcomes.

In Southend-on-Sea, the Virtual School is enormously proud of the achievements of our children. We know they often succeed despite the challenges they experience. The educational attainment of our students continues to improve against expected national outcomes. The recent Virtual School achievement awards evening celebrated the achievements, attendance and progress made by our students, which was made possible by the support of all those involved with each and every child.

In 2014 Virtual Schools and the Heads of Virtual Schools become a statutory feature of the work carried out by local authorities in order to address the needs of looked after children. Ministers therefore want Headteachers to have a greater role in working with schools to ensure that duty is fulfilled. Effective use of Pupil Premium linked to the educational outcomes in individual young people's Personal Education Plan (PEP) will help to further the academic successes of our students.

In addition to monitoring education of all Looked After Children and in particular the PEPs so that targeted support could be given to meet the needs of individual students, the Virtual School has provided a range of other services to support the education of Southend LAC:

- Magazine subscriptions
- Mentoring and other group work offered to LAC via YMCA
- Activity sessions, and days out offered by SETSA this year these have included a trip to the zoo and theatre workshop, and performance.
- 'Just Right State' 6 week group for carers and children
- Residential Sailing trip for year 10 11 and 12 (14 places)
- Support and training for Designated Teachers via network meetings, a training day and an emotion coaching course as well as online training package and additional support as requested eg training in individual schools.

- Advice and support to foster carers and other professionals via attendance at team meetings and forums.
- Introduction of progress visits to schools where LAC are based
- Virtual School Awards Evening for LAC

Cirdan Sailing Trust

Southend Virtual School and Young Carers Residential Trip 22nd October – 28th October 2016.

14 young people from The Virtual School and Southend Young Carers attended an off shore sailing residential trip during half term. The adventure involved our young people becoming part of the sailing crew and taking an active part in all aspects of operating the ship and life on board. The young people successfully sailed from Portsmouth to Ipswich over the course of 7 days at sea which involved a challenging night sail where all young people were responsible for navigating through difficult rough seas.

The young people's attitude was outstanding throughout the trip, working effectively as a team, building resilience and overcoming personal challenges. The trip was a huge success and the Virtual School are committed to running the trip again next summer.

Challenges for the coming year

Over the coming year we will work with our fostering colleagues to support young people to maintain both stable placements and to fully engage and succeed with education placements.

We will work hard at further challenging schools to ensure that they make best use of the resources available in order to support our children effectively and to use our new E-PEP system to monitor closely the impact of academic plans.

Our main challenge remains those in years 10 & 11 where any disruption in their placements and or schools impact greatly on their ability to achieve in their academic success.

We will find new and creative ways of engaging our young people and consulting with our looked after children's expert group to gain their views and ideas.

We are working hard to raise the aspirations of our young people and the families who care for them. We will be working in partnership with a University to give our young people a taster of University life and to show them what an academic future could hold for them.

CAMHS support to Foster Carers

Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Looked after Children

Our senior MH worker continues to develop her remit to address the emotional health and wellbeing of the Borough's looked after children.

There are currently 44 open referrals to the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service.

Work undertaken in the previous 12 months includes:

- Initial visits to complete an assessment of the child's difficulties and the family's need for intervention.
- Return visits and on-going support to families on a short term basis.
- Direct work with children.
- Direct work with Kinship Carer.
- Direct work with foster parent(s) to help sustain the placement and encourage reflective parenting.
- Family group work with four families (including Special Guardians); including mediation session following an incident.
- Attendance at professional meetings including LAC Reviews and Disruption meetings.
- Providing guidance and support through emails and the online Fostering Community to all Foster Parents.
- Co-ordination of the LAC Forums - consultation service with EWMHS.
- Crisis Intervention Work.
- Sibling Bond Assessment.
- Planning and development work on Therapeutic Plans and a Fostering Handbook – a reference guide for foster parents.
- Attendance at Group Clinical Supervision.
- A six week Just Right State Group had five children and their foster parent/carers complete the programme.
- A six week Non-Violent Resistance Parenting Group.
- Co-ordinate and co-facilitate the LAC Parent's Support Forum on a four times per year basis.
- Delivered training on Attachment and Trauma to group of Foster Parents and Special Guardians – offer monthly follow-up support to this cohort.
- Since September 2016, I have taken on two children for psychodynamic psychotherapy under the supervision of the Tavistock & Portman Clinic as part of my training.

My recommendation for the further development of this service is that we continue to work towards a trauma-informed foster parent group that have enhanced skills in understanding the impact of attachment difficulties and the ability offer a 're-parenting experience' to meet the emotional health and welfare needs of Looked After Children. To help them assist the children in developing their emotional regulation capacities, ability to form and maintain healthier relationships and engage socially with peers and other adults and participate meaningfully in a healthy, active life. I propose that we achieve this by regular training events and consistent, high quality support interventions as well as the continual recruitment of more foster carers. In the next year I plan to: -

1. Promote the service amongst the social work teams. I will do this by attending the Case Management Team's team meetings.
2. Increase the number of return visits to families to make more accurate observations and offer brief focused interventions.
3. Increase the number of families accessing Family Group Work.
4. Offer direct work to suitable children and/or their foster carers on short to mid-term basis.
5. Run annual Just Right State Group.
6. Run bi-annual Non Violent Resistance Parenting Group and offer ongoing support to families adopting this approach.
7. Focus on the training and on-going professional development of the foster parents.
8. Implement the therapeutic plans for those children identified as in need of therapeutic input, review and update these plans as appropriate.
9. Introduce the 'Theraplay' re-parenting approach and neural & sensory integration techniques to the foster parents.
10. Continue to work on a reference handbook for the foster parents to help them manage common difficulties. In the interim, to provide guidance and advice through 'How to...' sheets on various issues.
11. Attend Clinical Group Supervision and coffee mornings to offer advice and guidance.
12. Promote and co-ordinate the LAC Forum, held at the site of the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service [EWMHS].
13. Explore an opportunity to set up a LAC Support Group for older children.
14. Explore alternative interventions which may support children's emotional health and wellbeing needs.
15. Offer consultation and advice to the social work teams, supervising social workers and foster parents via the telephone.
16. Offer a monitoring and support service to social workers making referrals to the EWMHS to ensure that LAC are not disadvantaged by their circumstances – i.e. missing appointments due to change of placement. To offer advice on the wording of referrals to ensure that LAC have an optimum access to MH services.

Karen Eves

Senior Mental Health Social Worker

Consultation with Carers

We have continued throughout 2016 to consult with carers on all aspects of the service.

We undertook an update for the consultation undertaken with carers in late 2015 looking specifically at issues raised by carers in autumn 2013 and 2014. This showed:

- An increase of 11.5% of carers who always feel treated as an equal, partner or professional by the fostering service
- When asked the same of the child care teams, there was a slight decrease of 8.9%
- There was a 22.8% decrease in those carers who feel listened to properly which caused us great concern and is an area on which we have tried hard to improve in the past year.
- Those who reported that they were invited to relevant meetings remained at 100%.
- 75.4% of carers who responded said that communication with the fostering is always or usually good, a decrease of 21.6% again an area that the team have worked hard on in the past year.
- When asked the same of the child care teams, there was an increase of 17.2% from 2015 which was very positive.

And

- The number of carers who felt that we match children well was variable. Carers understood that due to the increase in placements required, this could not always be as positive as everybody would like, however as a service we need to monitor this closely so that carers feel well treated by the fostering service.

Our challenges for 2016 in response to this were:

- To improve matching
- To make sure that all paperwork is available when children are placed
- Listening to carers views
- Improve communication with carers

A further survey was sent out in early November 2016 and the full outcome of this survey will be reported in the 2017 annual report.

Southend Foster Families Community

The Foster Families Community (SFFC), previously the foster families' council, has continued to meet on a regular basis throughout 2016 and have supported a number of activities for Looked after Children and their foster families, as listed above. They have been able to use these meetings to consult with carers about their views on the development of the service and continue to do so.

'The Southend foster families' community exists to promote the needs of foster carer's and to help where they can in that task. They undertake fund raising to provide days out and experiences for fostered children and the birth children of foster carer's.

Staying Put

During 2016 the numbers of young people in staying put arrangements has increased from 28 to 36. This enables Looked after Children to remain with their foster carers not only post 16, but up to 21. This is encouraging our young people to remain in education as they have the stability and support of the family with whom they have often lived for many years.

As stated above, we currently have 36 young people who have remained in their foster placement post 18. Whilst positive for the young people concerned it does mean that adolescent placements are lost from fostering for a few years, so the team need to work hard to bridge this gap within their recruitment of new carers.

For our care leavers who are unable or unwilling to stay with their carers, we have worked hard in 2016 to continue to increase high quality supported accommodation locally and will be looking over the next year at fully implementing a supported lodgings service.

Private Fostering

All private fostering assessments are conducted in line with the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*. In addition to the assessment, a DBS Enhanced Disclosure is obtained for all relevant adults in the households and local authority checks and medical information (where deemed necessary) are obtained. An initial notification is made to the Private Fostering Panel at which point a recommendation is made to continue to full assessment or in some cases a

decision made at this early stage to prohibit the proposed private foster carer. Completed assessments are presented to the Private Fostering Panel for final consideration and the recommendation to confirm and support the arrangement is ratified by the chair of the Private Fostering Panel.

In 2016 we continued to build links with Southend Airport regarding processes when children/young people are accompanied by people that are not close family to detect child trafficking and develop protocols. Southend Airport is now represented at the LSCB Community Sub Group. To date we have received two referrals which were both appropriate. Although one child was identified who was going to be living out of borough, we were able to refer the case to Essex via our First Contact Team to ensure that the regulations and safeguarding procedures were followed.

Over the past year the demographics of privately fostered children has changed, leading to a number of the young people becoming looked after. In addition we have prohibited several households due to the concerns raised. We are aware that both young people and private foster carers can be reluctant to share when the arrangement is not working and consequently, privately fostered young people now have access to the same forums as Looked after Children and those on Child Protection Plans. In time a Child in Need Forum is proposed via the Planning and Engagement Team and this will be particularly beneficial for privately fostered youngsters given that all privately fostered children and young people are supported under a Child in Need Plan for the duration of their arrangement. For younger children the Young People's Participation Officer is planning a smaller group with activities which will enable them to engage in a fun environment.

At the OFSTED inspection in May 2016, Private Fostering was commended for the work undertaken and the safeguarding undertaken for placements.

Special Guardianship Orders:

The SGO Support Group continues to go from strength to strength. We have responded to Special Guardian's requests to increase the frequency of the group to six weekly. In the past year we have been able to undertake training and more recently have started to consult to look at improving services in the future.

It has become clear that due to tight timescales set by the courts, many family members feel pressurised into making a decision without fully understanding the long term impact. In the coming year we are looking at setting up a formal training for all family members applying for SGO's which will be run monthly due to timescales to help them to have the space to really consider the long term impact for them and their families. In addition, from the support group we have identified a few carers who are willing to talk through with prospective special guardians the real impact of the decisions that they are being asked to make.

Sadly, this year 6 children across two separate families have been placed on a Child Protection Plan. Equally, a very concerning trend over the past year has been the disruption of a number of special guardianship order placements, leading to young people coming back into local authority care or being returned directly to their parents without any level of risk assessment having been completed. This has been fed back to the local judiciary and where placements are found to be at risk, the new Edge of Care team will be asked to offer additional support once fully staffed.

Conclusion

The past year has been a busy time in the Fostering Service. Staffing has been a challenge due to a number of staff leaving on maternity leave and the huge increase in connected persons placements, however it is hoped that by January 2017 posts will again be filled.

We still have a few challenges for 2017:

- To continue to increase recruitment of foster carers to meet the needs of Southend children
- To develop further provision of high quality local supported accommodation
- To ensure recordings in a timely manner to ensure safeguarding
- To develop further out of hours support for foster carers through the edge of care team
- To further develop a cost effective, professional and forward thinking fostering service
- To embed further new procedures for long term linking to ensure quality assurance
- To ensure appropriate accommodation for UASC following Southend agreeing to regionally join the UASC National Transfer Scheme.

Final thoughts

Together with my colleagues and staff across the whole of Children's services, I would like to reiterate my thanks to all foster carers, their children and wider families for their work here in Southend.