

Southend -on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for People

to
Cabinet
on
7th January 2014

Report prepared by: Diane Keens, Group Manager,
Placements and Resources and Sue Hadley, Head of
Children's Services

Fostering Service Annual Report and updated Statement of Purpose

People Scrutiny Committee

Executive Councillor: James Courtenay

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

To report on the activities of the Fostering Service and to review the updated Statement of Purpose

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Annual Report, as at appendix 1 is noted.

2.2 That the revised Statement of Purpose, as at appendix 2 is agreed.

3. Background

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

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

3.2 National Minimum Standard 25.7 states that the Executive side of the Local Authority

- a) receive written reports on the management and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months

- b) 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
- c) satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

3.3 The Statement of Purpose has been included as Appendix 2 in this report to provide a context for the content of the Annual Report, and includes the details of all support for foster carers. It has been updated to reflect changes in 2013.

3.4 A recent consultation went out to all carers to ascertain whether carers felt that the fostering service had fully embedded this charter in the work that they undertake. The outcome of this consultation will inform and influence further service development. Some of the improvements are:

- During the past year there has been a huge improvement as to the number of carers who feel that they are usually or always treated equally and professionally. This has increased by 18%.
- During the past year the percentage of carers who feel that communication with the fostering service is 'always' or 'usually' good has risen by 9% to 73%
- During the past year there was an improvement of 39.5% of carers who reported communication between themselves and the child's social worker.

3.5 The Fostering inspection which we were awaiting this time last year, took place in early 2013. The service was judged overall as 'good' with some outstanding features reported. A full report on the outcome of this inspection was presented to Cabinet in 2013.

4. Other Options

There are no other options as it is a statutory requirement to present a report to the Executive and to update the Statement of Purpose annually.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

It is a statutory requirement to present a report to the Executive and to have an up-to-date Statement of Purpose.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

The Annual report sets out the framework for the work of the fostering Service. It directly supports the delivery of the Corporate Priority to 'Improve Outcomes for Vulnerable children'.

6.2 Financial Implications

If the service does not work efficiently in the recruitment and matching of children and young people this would have the impact of the Local Authority needing to purchase more external placements at a higher cost to the Local Authority. During 2013 over 93% of placements were made with in- house foster carers, an increase of 3% on 2012.

6.3 Legal Implications

This report, together with the quarterly report presented to the Executive Member ensures we are compliant Standard 25.7 of the Fostering Minimum Standards with this requirement.

6.4 People Implications

None

6.5 Property Implications

The fostering service moved to the Civic Centre on 10th November 2012. The service is now located with the other child care teams and no longer has the additional costs of maintaining a sub office. This has proven very positive in its first year.

6.6 Consultation

Consultation with foster and birth families and with children and young people fostered about the work and delivery of the service takes place on a regular basis. The fostering service was inspected in 2013, prospective foster carers, foster carers and looked after children were formally consulted at that time by inspectors.

Specific consultations have taken place during 2013 including the annual consultation for Children's services. A further consultation was undertaken in October 2013 to look at foster carers feelings, a year after the original survey was undertaken.

Quarterly meetings take place directly between the Head of Children's Services and the chair of the Southend Foster Families Council.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The recruitment of a diverse range of families enables us to better meet the needs of children Looked After in Southend. Local placements ensure that where appropriate, children and young people maintain links with their families, schools and communities. The outcome of the 2012 census indicated a changing demography in Southend and our Sufficiency Strategy takes into account the need to recruit more carers who can meet the needs of children and young people from Eastern European communities. This strategy is currently being updated. In addition we also have to prioritise carers who can support those children with challenging behaviour and those with complex additional needs.

6.8 Risk Assessment

No specific risks have been identified other than at 6.2 above.

6.9 Value for Money

The provision of an internal supply of foster carers and families ensures value for money.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. Background Papers

None

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Fostering Service Annual Report 2013

Appendix 2: Statement of Purpose