



# **Southend Fostering Service**

**ANNUAL REPORT FROM JANUARY - DECEMBER 2013**

# Welcome from Southend Fostering Service

## Introduction

I am pleased to present to you Southend Fostering service Annual Report for 2013. We have continued to grow in strength during the year with carers offering excellent care and support to the young children in their care. In January 2013 we at last had our long awaited fostering inspection, where the service was deemed 'Good' with some outstanding features which was very positive.

## 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 2013, placement stability in foster care has been maintained in the majority of cases and the fostering team continue to work 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.

The Southend Foster Families 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 also recognised the contribution of carers own children with an awards ceremony of their own in November 2013 and long service awards for foster carers in summer 2013. For 2014 we remain committed to building on the successes of the past two years. We look forward to finalising the developments of the new fee paid schemes and moving forward into the future.



Diane Keens  
Group Manager  
Placements & Resources

# 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)
- 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

There have been a number of changes in the fostering team over the past twelve months. Emmet Perry has embedded his place as Team Manager and has worked tirelessly to move the service into being fully electronic. There has been a full review of the current fee paid schemes which is now nearly complete and will be up and running during early 2014.

Several staff have moved on to new challenges and we have been successful in recruiting some enthusiastic staff to join what is a rapidly developing service.

Diane Keens continues as Group Manager for Placements & Resources and to be the registered manager for the service.

Recruitment plans have been put into place which have shown an increase in interest, although we continue, as do most agencies, to gain interest from enough new carers to meet Southend's needs.

There are now 9 fostering households on the Southend Fostering Project, able to offer 23 placements to some of our most challenging young people.

The Project has enabled us to continue to compete with private agencies and to recruit some very experienced carers. This is a reduced number from 2012 as part of the review of our fostering schemes.

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.

At this point we are clear that we wish in the next 12 months to develop further our fee paid carers, who through the review are shown to be the most flexible provision for us to offer a high quality placements for a wide variety of young people.

## Statistics for past twelve months

There has been a reduction in the number of children Looked after, year on year, whilst the needs of many of these young people have become more complex. In 2013 however numbers have increased due to a number of large sibling groups entering the care system. This has led to a change in the type of families we need to recruit to meet the more complex needs presented.

- Number of fostering Households approved between January – December 2013 7
- Number of fostering households as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013 - **102**
- New Family & Friends carers - **13**
- Number of applications to foster - **113**
- How many children were placed with in house foster carers at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013 (*rather than placed in a PVI placement*)- **156**
- 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*) - **14**

## 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

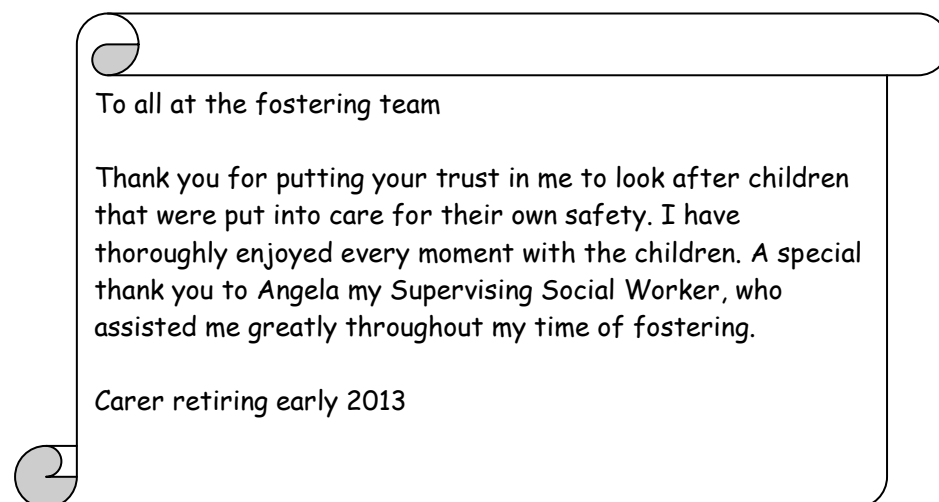
carers, local to their families and friends. The service has this year through its advertising strategies, increased the numbers of people enquiring about fostering by more than 100% on 2012. We have recognised that we need to be using alternative methods of recruitment to revitalise our programme such as through the use of social media sites and now have an active Facebook page. We continue to use ongoing methods such as bus back advertising and radio as well as attending a number of local events and activities.

During 2013 we ran 3 Skills to Foster training programmes involving 27 households including 13 kinship carers.

From this, 27 households who continued to full assessment: 17 Foster carers and Friends and Family carers were approved to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013. 7 Households are currently being assessed.

The number of beds available has dropped slightly to 176 due partly to those young people remaining post 18. We currently have 102 Fostering Households.

The team have completed 8 kinship assessments in the past year which have subsequently gone to SGO placements, and this is an area that we are looking at for 2014, to prevent duplication of tasks.



## Fostering Panel

In 2013 we have run 11 panels. The following statistics are available from their work:

- Form F's presented (general approval): 7
- Form F's presented (for a specific child): 13

- Children presented for long term linking: 3
- Household Reviews presented to panel: 13  
*(Annual reviews are only presented to panel after the first year and every three years thereafter)*
- Carers approval terminated (due to concerns) 0
- Carers approval terminated (retirement and resignation.) 9

Hi Barbara,

Just want to say a huge thank you to you for all your ongoing support to us. Sorry to have bombarded you with our woes the minute you were through the door on Tuesday. It's so easy to talk with you where our support networks just don't get it! I suppose if they were Carers too it would be easier.

You always help us understand and make sense of things.

THANK YOU.

June 2013

## Activities since January 2013

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 2013, Southend Fostering Service has coordinated and supported the following activities in conjunction with the Southend Foster Families Council:

- Pantomime tickets,
- Chinese meal,
- quiz,
- Indian meal,
- Spring Fete,
- Teddy bears picnic,
- Kids kingdom,
- Xmas party,
- Chessington,
- Beach Hut BBQ,
- Pub Grub Night.

In September 2013 the Carers Long Service awards took place attended by; The worshipful the Mayor, the Portfolio Holder Cllr Courtenay; members of the

Corporate Parenting Group and the Head of Service, Sue Hadley. 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. A tour of Porters was given at the end of the evening which gave a wonderful sense of the history of the building.

In November 2013, awards took place for the children of carers to celebrate their involvement in supporting our Looked after Children.

# The Virtual Head Teacher

## Message from Sarah Beales, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Virtual School Headteacher's role is to co-ordinate services for looked after children and their families, so that all school-age children in the care of Southend Borough Council are receiving the best possible education. The Virtual School 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 and supporting them and their carers to help them achieve the best possible outcomes.



As a Virtual School, we are enormously proud of the achievements of our children in care. We know they often succeed against the odds. Our educational attainments of our children in care continue to improve as shown at the recent LAC children's awards where a considerable number of the children in addition to other achievements had 100% attendance and I would like to thank you all as carers for the part you have played in this.

In the past year the virtual school achieved "Healthy Schools" status, only the second in the country and we are now moving onto a new challenge for 2014, extending the virtual school to years 12 & 13.

*Sarah Beales*

To Emmet & Patrick

Thank you once again for all you help and support.  
The respite is now in place, thank you so much

Really appreciated

Gill (carer for a child with severe disabilities)

# **CAMHS support to Foster Carers**

## **Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Looked after Children**

### **Pilot Projects in 2013**

#### **January 2013**

Training was provided in mental health awareness to professionals, including Foster Carers. The training was well attended and those who attended felt it to be worthwhile.

#### **March 2013 New Group – Exploring Identity group**

A therapeutic art group was arranged for adolescent girls aged 12-15 in CFCS and for LAC not attending CFCS. It was hoped the group would be made up of 50% looked after children and 50% young people at the end of their treatment in CFCS.

There were not enough participants to run this group in January and we therefore reviewed the situation and decided to increase the age range to 14-17 old females in March.

The group ran from March with a small number of young people and it proved to be very useful for the young people taking part. We are hoping to run this group again in 2014.

#### **Contact with young people in their foster homes**

This approach was felt to be the most child friendly way of engaging with young people, and was at their suggestion. This has worked well. To provide an alternative to individual visits, a pilot has been organised for some Drop In sessions at two separate locations from Nov 2013.

#### **Other approaches for engaging with looked after children and their carers April to Nov 2013**

The lead for Emotional Health and Wellbeing (Lainey Hall), attended an impromptu Invite to Skills to Foster course and gave a brief overview of the support offered to foster carers including group clinical supervision of newly approved foster careers. It is intended that this will become a permanent part of Skills training.

In August, Lainey attended “Picnic in the Park” to meet carers, foster children and birth children. This was to give them the chance to get to know her, to increase her profile with carers. She will continue to attend other events throughout 2014.

In August, as a way of creating opportunities to meet looked after children, Lainey sent letters to Bournemouth Park Infant and Nursery school and Eastwood Academy in the first instance, making them aware of telephone consultation opportunities or face to face consultations for Looked after children. This is to be extended during 2014.

#### **Draft plan for 2014**

- A three month pilot Drop In for foster carers and foster children at the monthly coffee mornings at Dundonald Drive.



- A three month pilot Drop In for foster carers, foster children, teachers, children's centre staff and other professionals at Summercourt Children's centre.
- A three month pilot of support for staff at the 16+ team, around emotional health and wellbeing for 16+.
- A second "Exploring Identity" group for looked after children, alongside young people coming to end of treatment at CFCS.
- Attending Skills to Foster training to meet with prospective carers to talk about the support available to them if they go on to become foster carers with Southend Borough Council.

**Research** – To visit LAC services in the nearest boroughs to Southend to observe how their LAC services operate. To bring back some good practice ideas that may be implemented in Southend.

**Core Work**

Continue the work started in 2012/2013, which endeavours to cater for looked after children's emotional health and wellbeing and this includes.

**Monthly Clinical Supervision** of two groups of carers, Project Carers and Newly approved Foster Carers.

**Informal consultation** - to fostering team as and when needed, and after peer group supervision sessions

**Clinic Work** - continue to provide daily clinic appointments in the clinic at the Child and Family Consultation Service.

**Looked After Children Forum Consultation meetings** – continue to offer looked after children Forum Consultation meetings with the Team Manager every other week for professionals and foster carers in CAMHS/CFCS clinic, at Rochford hospital

**Phone Consultation** - to foster carers, and other professionals. Offering consultation, advice and guidance to all professionals.

**Corporate Parenting Meetings** -Input and attendance at Corporate Parenting meetings.

**Meetings with LAC Nurse** - Monthly meetings with Looked after Children's Nurse to discuss individual looked after children's need.

# Children's LAC Awards

70 of Southend's children who are living with foster carers or in residential homes were invited to an event on 26<sup>th</sup> September to acknowledge and celebrate their excellent achievements in education. 70 young people, from 4 years old to 21 years old, were awarded certificates or bursaries. The event was hosted by Shoeburyness High School and included the presentation of individual awards. The awards were presented to the children and young people by The Worshipful the Mayor and special guests

Miss Kirsty Swain.



Kirsty is a professional dancer. She won the hearts of the public when she was runner-up in the 2011 'So You Think You Can Dance' competition on BBC1. Kirsty has also appeared on stage and in a number of films, including Mama Mia and Mrs Henderson Presents.

In November 2011 Kirsty was announced as the Special Educational Needs Patron for the Royal Academy of Dance/Jack Petchy '**Step into Dance**' programme.

Kirsty was diagnosed as partially deaf at the age of 12 and wears hearing aids. She has never let it stop her dancing and she is able to do what she is passionate about by feeling the vibrations and beat of the music.

And

Corey from THE LUMINITES!



Before the 5<sup>th</sup> Member was added the Luminites were finalist on Britain's Got Talent 2013. Corey was born in Southend.

Bursaries were donated by political Groups within the Council, The University of Essex, The Shrimpers Trust, Westcliff Rotary Club, Southend Lions, Southend Virtual School for Looked after Children and various individual donations. They were awarded for a variety of achievements including gaining a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours degree in Law for one of our care leavers, Sporting Achievement and Academic Progress.

# Consultation with Carers

We have continued throughout 2013 to consult with carers on all aspects of the service.

We undertook an update for the consultation undertaken with carers in 2012 looking specifically at issues raised by carers in autumn 2012. This showed:

- An increase of 18% of carers who feel treated as an equal, partner or professional by the fostering service
- When asked the same of the child care teams, although was a slight decrease on those who felt they were always or usually treated as such, when we include those who stated "sometimes" as their answer, this showed a huge increase of 24.5%
- There was a 9% increase in those carers who feel listened to properly
- A huge increase of 16.5% of those who responded who said that they were invited to relevant meetings and none who said they were rarely or never invited.
- 73% of carers who responded said that communication with the fostering is good, a rise of 9%.
- When asked the same of the child care teams, there was a huge improvement from 2012 by 39.5%.
- An increase of 26.5% of carers who felt that the quality of Placement Agreement meetings had improved
- Although there was a decrease in the number of carers who felt that we match children well, there was an increase of 14.5% of carers who said that they did not feel pressurised into taking placements. This would appear to show how supportive and open our carers' are to helping the fostering service in what can often be a very difficult job.

Our challenges for next year in response to this are:

- To improve matching
- To make sure that all paperwork is available when children are placed
- Listening to carers views
- Ensuring that carers feel treated as an equal, partner or professional by the children's' social workers.

One really positive comment made was;

*"We are very happy with the service. We have an excellent supervising social worker and have always felt valued and appreciated – Thank You"*

# Southend Foster Families Council

The Foster Families Council has continued to meet on a regular basis throughout 2013 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 Council has been used to consult with carers to ensure that they are fully a part of any development of the service. This has proven very successful with the major service redesign which has been undertaken in 2013.

'The Southend foster families' council exists to promote the needs of foster carer's and to help where they can in that task. They fund raise to provide days out and experiences for fostered children and the birth children of foster carer's. This year has been a challenge to fully engage carers and attendance at meetings has dropped slightly. This is a challenge for next year, to ensure that SFFC can fully represent Southend Foster Carers.

## Staying Put

During 2013 the numbers of young people in staying put arrangements has increased from 9 to 14. 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.

Our priority in 2013 was to develop an active Supported Lodgings scheme to give more options for appropriate housing to care leavers. We currently have 1 supported lodgings carer and this remains a further challenge for 2014.

As stated above, we currently have 14 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.

# 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 CRB Enhanced Disclosure is obtained for all relevant adults in the households and local authority checks and medical information (where deemed necessary) are obtained. The completed assessment is then presented to the Private Fostering Panel for consideration; the recommendation to confirm and support the arrangement is ratified by the chair of the Private Fostering Panel.

Over the period from January 2013, significant efforts have been made to raise awareness of Private Fostering within Southend. This has included:

## Awareness raising

By targeting different departments we are building on ensuring a consistent approach to private fostering in Southend.

## Systems Changes:

- ✓ Customer Care Management Team which incorporates Housing Benefit, main switchboard and generic customer care service staff have now placed a script on the customer relations system to ensure that references from the public to private fostering are managed appropriately and notifications made. The designated officer attended a team meeting on 30/08/13 and briefed the staff on private fostering. The system has gone live and the designated officer has access to the Lagan system and checks daily for any notifications via the customer care service. No notifications as yet.
- ✓ Housing and Council Tax Benefit – Due to their forms breaking when new amendments are added ICT have been rebuilding the system. The change we have requested advertising what private fostering is on Housing and Council Tax benefit plus the change of circumstance form will be included in the rebuild.

## Presentations:

- ✓ Team Meetings for Supported Housing (10/09/13), Private Sector Housing (11/09/13) and Tenancy Services (18/09/13)

- ✓ BME Thematic Group 11/09/13
- ✓ 3 sessions held on 26/09/13 for The SPOR Team, Localities Team (East & West), CTPLD (Community Team for People with a Learning Disability), Care Broker Team, Hospital Social Work Team, START Team and Review Team. The training was introduced as mandatory and 35 people attended the awareness sessions. Approximately 50 more staff to train and additional session booked for 05/11/13.
- ✓ Stall for private fostering in place at the Community in Harmony

Attending:

- Success for All subgroup at Shoeburyness High School 04/10/13
- Integrated Youth Support Service Team Meeting 02/10/13
- Care Management Team Meeting 1 14/10/13
- Meeting with Learning Development Officer 08/10/13 to discuss private fostering

Further promotional:

- Private Fostering Lead has met with Market and Recruitment Officer to discuss promotional activities. Current promotional materials to be revamped following feedback from different groups regarding confusion with the term private fostering. To concentrate more on 'are you looking after someone else's child?'
- To launch Southend private fostering week in November 2013.
- Consultation with contacts given by the Senior Advisor for Equalities and Inclusion
- Market and Recruitment Officer and Designated Lead to further explore possibilities regarding locating and effectively targeting different groups via the Mosaic System.
- Education and Training Forums (School Nurse Service) as have yet to be notified of exact date
- Meeting with Learning and Development Officer 08/10/13 to plan delivery of private fostering awareness sessions to NQSW's and Student Social Workers
- Target schools regarding parent evenings and adult colleges including discussions regarding information that could be included in the prospectus

During the course of January 2013 to December 2013, Southend Borough Council has received 6 new notifications.

The outcomes of these notifications are listed below.

To date, 6 private fostering arrangements have been confirmed at the Private Fostering Panel and continue.

The presenting of private fostering assessments to Private Fostering Panel is not a requirement of the Minimum Standards. However, the Fostering Service has decided that this will serve to further promote the safeguarding practices within Southend.

Despite huge awareness raising over the past year, there continues to be very limited numbers of arrangements identified, and this is a further challenge for the coming year.

Work undertaken this year has clearly identified what is required from this role and we have successfully developed a full time senior fostering worker post to cover Private Fostering and Special Guardianship Support, a newly identified legislative role. The senior worker who has covered this post for the past six months was successfully appointed to the full time post and took up post in December 2013.

# Inspections

In January 2013 the long awaited fostering inspection took place. This was very positive with the service being judged as 'good' overall with some areas described by the inspectors as outstanding.

The new OFSTED inspection regime means that in future there will not be an independent fostering inspection, separate to the mainstream children's inspection. The service will now be inspected as part of the full children's inspections and will be seen through the journey of the child. We look forward to this new challenge.

## Conclusion

The past year has been a time of great change in the Fostering Service. A new manager has brought new ideas and has moved the service forward to ensure that it is always child focused in its thinking. There have been changes in staff and an embedding of new practices; electronic working and all working together in one building.

There has been a complete review of our fostering schemes to ensure equity, openness and flexibility and hopefully will give us a firm footing on which to launch into 2014.

We still have a few challenges for 2014:

- To increase recruitment of foster carers to meet the needs of Southend children
- To develop further provision of supported lodgings
- To become totally electronic

- To ensure recordings in a timely manner to ensure safeguarding
- To further develop a cost effective, professional and forward thinking fostering service

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 your work here in Southend.