

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for People

to
Cabinet
on
6th January 2015

Report prepared by: Diane Keens, Group Manager,
Placements Resources and John O'Loughlin, Head of
Children's Services

Fostering Service Annual Report and updated Statement of Purpose

Scrutiny Committee – People

Executive Councillor: Councillor Anne Jones

A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

To report on the last years activities in the Fostering Service and agree the updated Statement of Purpose in line with Standard 16 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Annual Report (Appendix 1) and Statement of Purpose (Appendix 2) be agreed.

3. Background

- 3.1 The provision, standard and operations of the Fostering service is 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 2014.
- 3.4 A consultation was sent out to all carers in October 2014 to ascertain improvements in the service and support that they receive. The outcome of this consultation will inform service developments for 2015.
- 3.5 The Fostering inspection which took place in early 2013, judged the service overall as 'good' with some outstanding features reported. The report for the outcome of this was presented to cabinet early in 2013. The grading awarded for each outcome area were:
- Outcomes for children and young people are – Good
 - The quality of the service is – Good
 - Safeguarding children and young people are – Good
 - Leadership and management – Good
- 3.6 There were no statutory requirements from this Inspection and only three minor recommendations which have been made to improve practice further:
- Give children information about the foster carer before arrival at the placement and any information they need or reasonably request about the placement (NMS 11.3)
 - Provide foster carers with full information about the child as set out in standard 3.9. Information should include risk assessments (NMS 11.2)
 - Support children to develop positive self-esteem and emotional resilience to confront prejudice. This relates specifically to the positive aspects of being a looked after child. (NMS 12.1b)

These have now all been addressed by the service.

- 3.7 Standard 25.7 of the Fostering Minimum Standards stipulates that quarterly reports are presented to the portfolio holder. The service has been compliant with this requirement and the annual report covers the accumulation of this information
- 3.8 The Looked after Children & Care Leavers accommodation sufficiency strategy is currently being updated to ensure that sufficient resources are identified to meet the needs of our Looked after Children with respect to placements and move on accommodation for the next five years.

4. Other Options

None

5. Reasons for Recommendations

The Fostering Statement of Purpose outlines the Fostering Service core services and the annual report outlines the activities undertaken by Southend Fostering Service during 2014 and the outcomes and impact of the service.

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 2014 over 86% of placements were made with in- house foster carers, a slight decrease from 2013 due to the numbers placed for adoption and the decrease in LAC numbers.

6.3 Legal Implications

None, however the Local Authority does have statutory requirement to provide reports to the executive.

6.4 People Implications

None

6.5 Property Implications

The fostering service moved to the Civic Centre on 10th November 2012. The service has now been co-located with the other child care teams for nearly 2 years and no longer has the additional costs of maintaining a sub office. This has continued to prove very positive.

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 2014 including the annual consultation for Children's services. A further consultation was undertaken in October 2014 to look at foster carers feelings.

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

The Annual reports explains the function and activity of the fostering service and does not pose a risk to the council

6.9 Value for Money

The provision of an internal supply of foster carers and families ensures value for money. High cost external placements are negated.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

None

6.11 Environmental Impact

None

7. **Background Papers**

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Fostering Service Annual report 2014

Appendix 2 Statement of Purpose