



Southend Fostering Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2014

Welcome from Southend Fostering Service

Introduction

I am pleased to present to you Southend Fostering service Annual Report for 2014. This has been a very positive year for Southend Fostering Service, with an increase in the number of carers gradually being recruited. We have been fully staffed for most of the year and have worked hard at developing the service and the supports offered to our carers.

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 2014, placement stability in foster care has 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.

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 recognised the hard work and commitment of our carers with the annual long service awards for foster carers in September 2014. For 2015 we remain committed to building on the successes of the past few years. We look forward to developing the service with the new fee paid scheme now fully in place and an innovations bid put forward to enable the development of a 24/7 immediate response team.



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)
- 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

There have been a number of changes in the fostering team over the past twelve months. Emmet Perry has continued to work tirelessly to move the service into being fully electronic. The fee pay review has been completed and is now fully implemented, giving scope for development over the coming year.

The new staff are now fully embedded into the team and are an enthusiastic and skilled addition to the team. We have had two members of staff retire this year, after many years of service and both will be greatly missed.

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. 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.

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 new fostering scheme.

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.

The implementation of the fostering review will allow us to develop further our 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 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 2014 the numbers have continued to drop. This has led to a change in the type of families we need to recruit to meet the more complex needs presented.

(October 2013-Sept 2014)

- Number of fostering Households approved **5**
- Number of fostering households as at 31st September 2014 - **89**
- New Family & Friends carers - **3** (plus 7 under connected persons)
- Number of information packs sent - **173**
- How many children were placed with in house foster carers at 31st September 2014 *(rather than placed in a PVI placement)*- **136** (59%)
- 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)* - **22**

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 130% 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. We have this combined several fostering and adoption events which have proven very successful and we are looking at developing this further in the coming year.

During 2014 we ran 3 Skills to Foster training programmes involving 16 households including 10 kinship carers (including connected persons).

From this, 16 households who continued to full assessment: 8 Foster carers and Friends and Family carers were approved to 31st September 2014. 9 Households are currently being assessed.

The number of beds available has dropped slightly to 164 due partly to those young people remaining post 18. We currently have 96 Fostering Households (including connected persons).

The team have completed 3 kinship assessments in the past year which have subsequently gone to SGO placements. This is an area that we have looked at in 2014, and new processes are now in place to prevent duplication of tasks.

We have just had our Annual Household Review and I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for all your hard work and dedication shown towards our family.

The support we have received from you has been phenomenal and is very much appreciated.

You are always polite, professional, conscientious, thorough, organised and a pleasure to work with.

Social Services have also been supportive of us and we are very pleased with our progression of experience as foster carers.

We are looking forward to our future within fostering.

Kind regards

Johanna Bennett

Sept 2014

Fostering Panel

Between October 2013 and September 2014 we have run 9 panels. The following statistics are available from their work:

- Form F's presented (general approval): 5
- Form F's presented (for a specific child): 3 (plus 7 under connected persons)
- Children presented for long term linking: 9
- Household Reviews presented to panel: 10
(Annual reviews are only presented to panel after the first year)
- Carers approval terminated (due to concerns) 1
- Carers approval terminated (retirement and resignation.) 12

Please pass on a massive thank you to Pete and Jenny M who supported the transition of Sophie being placed into her adoptive placement. They were helpful, professional and extremely flexible and supportive
So we want to make sure we let them know that
Kind regards
Jo

March 2014

Activities since January 2014

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 2014, Southend Fostering Service has coordinated and supported the following activities in conjunction with the Southend Foster Families Council:

- Pantomime tickets,
- Christmas Party
- Help with recruitment activity for Fostering fortnight
- Rolla City for some of our slightly older children
- Chinese meal,

- quiz,
- Indian meal,
- Teddy bears picnic,
- Kids kingdom,
- Beach Hut BBQ,
- Pub Grub Night.

In September 2014 the Carers Long Service awards took place attended by; The worshipful the Mayor, the Portfolio Holder Cllr Jones; members of the Corporate Parenting Group; Director for People, Simon Leftley 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.

In November 2014, awards are due to take place for the children of carers to celebrate their involvement in supporting our Looked after Children.

The Virtual Head Teacher

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

As a Virtual School, we are 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. This year, four students gained places at University, while an improved number achieved 5A* – C GCSEs including English and Mathematics.

In the past year the virtual schools and the Heads of Virtual Schools have become a statutory feature of the work carried out by local authorities in order to address the needs of looked after children. The increase in the Pupil Premium linked to the targets in the Personal Education Plan will help to further the academic successes of our students.

Karen Collard

Dear Howard and Emmet,
 Thank you for your assistance last night in helping me to manage an emergency move to foster placement with Justine Maynard.
 R has now been collected from Justine's and taken back to DB where I think he will remain (Hopefully)
 I wanted to let you know that Justine was wonderful with R last night, not only immediately agreeing to support R at very short notice despite having a full house, but also in comforting a very distressed and unsettled little boy. Paul and Justine were beyond compassionate, comforting and calm with both R and

CAMHS support to Foster Carers

Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Looked after Children

One of the team's new workers, Phil Bugg joined Lainey to support this group which continues to go from strength to strength. It is a group which is valued by carers

In December 2013, Lainey attended the Christmas party to network with foster children, birth children and foster carers. The party was very well attended and therefore she had the opportunity to interact with looked after children in an environment which was fun for them. She also had the opportunity to support and encourage one particular foster girl, who had come without her foster carer. This gave her the opportunity to get to know this challenging little girl.

Three month pilot Drop in for foster carers and foster children, during the monthly support mornings at Dundonald Drive. This began Nov 2013 and continued into early 2014. Carers appeared to feel comfortable to chat about any difficulties in an informal environment, without any pressure. Lainey also had the opportunity to observe any foster children playing in this friendly environment.

16+ Team

Time has been spent with the team talking about their young people and their needs. An open Drop In together with Sharon Norton LAC nurse will be developed following the teams move to their new premises in early 2015.

January 2014

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.

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

Looked After Children Forum Consultation meetings –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.

Unfortunately Lainey left the Department in August 2014. The role has been redefined, to offer more targeted support to foster carers and it is hoped will be filled by early 2015.

Children's LAC Awards

45 of Southend's children who are living with foster carers or in residential homes were invited to an event on 25th September 2014 to acknowledge and celebrate their excellent achievements in education. Young people, from 4 years old to 21 years old, were awarded certificates or bursaries. The event was hosted by South Essex College and included the presentation of individual awards. The awards were presented to the children and young people by Jack Monroe; the Deputy Mayor and other special guests



Jack Monroe

Jack Monroe blogs at [A Girl Called Jack](#) and is author of the forthcoming A Girl Called Jack recipe book. She writes a monthly column, [Austerity bites](#), for Society Guardian.

Bursaries were donated by political Groups within the Council, Westcliff Rotary; Southend Lions; Shrimpers Trust; Essex University various individual donations. They were awarded for a variety of achievements including sporting Achievement and Academic Progress.

Consultation with Carers

We have continued throughout 2014 to consult with carers on all aspects of the service.

We undertook an update for the consultation undertaken with carers in late 2013 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

And

- 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 2014 in response to this were:

- 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"

A further survey was sent out in early October 2014 and at the point of completing this annual report of the small number so far returned, there is a huge increase in the positive responses, showing in most categories a satisfaction rate of 80% or more. The full outcome of this survey will be reported in the 2015 annual report.

Southend Foster Families Council

The Foster Families Council (SFFC) has continued to meet on a regular basis throughout 2014 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 were used to consult with carers to ensure that they were fully a part of any development of the service. This has proven very successful with the major service redesign which has now been fully implemented.

'The Southend foster families' council 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 This year has been a challenge to fully engage carers and attendance at meetings has dropped slightly. This continues to be a challenge for next year, to ensure that SFFC can fully represent Southend Foster Carers.

It is hoped that in 2015 the SFFC will successfully complete registration as a charity through the Inland Revenue which will help with fund raising. Some of the fund raising events held this year have been:

- 3rd July Coffee Morning with Clothes for Cash raising £50.00
- 30th July The Teddy Bears Picnic with 25 people. No cost.
- 2nd August Social Night with Curry with 51 people. £305.00 raised.
- 15th August The Beach Hut Picnic with 14 people. No cost
- 29th August Picnic in Southchurch Park with Entertainer. 40 people - cost £50.00
- 4th Sept Coffee Morning with Clothes for Cash raising £50.00
- 2nd October. Coffee Morning with Clothes for Cash raising £25.00
- 3rd October The Home Made Cake Sale. Raised £315.00

Staying Put

During 2014 the numbers of young people in staying put arrangements has increased from 14 to 22. 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 2014 was to develop an active Supported Lodgings scheme to give more options for appropriate housing to care leavers. Unfortunately to date this is an area that we have been unable to move forward in a positive way, but this now remains a high priority for 2015.

As stated above, we currently have 22 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 2014, we have continued to raise awareness of Private Fostering within Southend. This has included:

Awareness raising

The Statistical First Release for Year ending 31st March 2014 reports that 38% of children reported to be in private fostering arrangements were born in the UK but that this proportion has been declining since 2008. 2013 was the first year where the majority of children reported to be in new private fostering arrangements were born overseas and the numbers from overseas continues to increase in 2014. A meeting has been undertaken with the Senior Knowledge & Information Advisor (Information Governance Team). The Mosaic system will be used to map BME groups within the borough and establish what preferred methods of contact are for different groups.

This will enable us to specifically target groups in a meaningful way and potentially raise the levels of notification. It will be possible to individually mail shot addresses that private fostering is more likely to apply to.

Private fostering has been posted on the Southend Learning Network used by all Southend schools and Team Meetings have been attended to raise awareness with Children's Social Workers.

Planned:

- Faith Leadership Group to be attended at the earliest opportunity.
- To obtain dates of Education and Training Forums (School Nurse Service) as have yet to be notified of exact date
- Target schools regarding parent evenings. To follow up on proposals such as advertising at the Adult Community College via screen, brochure and website.

By targeting different departments we are building on ensuring a consistent approach to private fostering in Southend. The past year has been a busy time on several of the current private fostering arrangements, leading to two formal prohibitions being issued. In addition two of the young people have been received into Local Authority care.

The past year has shown a great improvement in the identification of Private Fostering arrangements, the assessment of suitability; the use of formal prohibitions where necessary and the monitoring of arrangements within legislative timescales.

Conclusion

The past year has been a time of great change in the Fostering Service. New ideas have 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 and electronic working.

There has been a complete review of our fostering schemes to ensure equity, openness and flexibility this has now been embedded into practice, leaving us flexibility to develop further in the coming year.

We still have a few challenges for 2015:

- To continue to increase recruitment of foster carers to meet the needs of Southend children
- To develop further provision of supported lodgings
- To ensure recordings in a timely manner to ensure safeguarding
- To develop further out of hours support for foster carers
- 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 their work here in Southend.