



Southend Fostering Service

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Welcome from Southend Fostering Service

Introduction

I am pleased to present to you Southend Fostering service Annual Report for 2015. 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 2015, 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.

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 2015. For 2016 we remain committed to building on the successes of the past few years. We look forward to developing the service with the new mental health worker now in place and the introduction of therapeutic care plans specifically for support and a new long term linking process.



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

2015 has been a year of embedding the changes made in 2014.

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.

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.

The implementation of the fostering review has allowed us 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 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 2015 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 2014-Sept 2015)

- Number of fostering Households approved - **14** *(5 in 2014)*
- Number of fostering households as at 31st September 2015 - **94** *(89 in 2014)*
- New Family & Friends carers - **8** (plus 10 under connected persons)
- Number of information packs sent - **173**
- How many children were placed with in house foster carers at 31st September 2015 *(rather than placed in a PVI placement)*- **151** *(136 in 2014)* Including 13 in connected persons placements) (60%)
- 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)* – **28** *(22 in 2014)*

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 increase the numbers of people enquiring about fostering. 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 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 2015 we ran 5 Skills to Foster training programmes involving 19 households.

From this, 23 households who continued to full assessment: 22 Foster carers and Friends and Family carers were approved to 31st September 2015, 9 Households are currently being assessed.

The number of beds available has increased to between 160-180 (some beds are only available for siblings). We currently have 108 (96 in 2014) Fostering Households (including connected persons).

The team have completed 8 kinship assessments in the past year which have subsequently gone to SGO placements. The new process developed in 2014 has successfully helped to prevent duplication in 2015.

Fostering Panel

Between October 2014 and September 2015 we have run 13 (*9 in 2014*) panels. The following statistics are available from their work:

- Form F's presented (general approval): 14 (*5 in 2014*)
- Form F's presented (for a specific child): 8 (*plus 13 currently under connected persons*)
- Children presented for long term linking: 7 (*9 in 2014*)
- Household Reviews presented to panel: 5
(*Annual reviews are only presented to panel after the first year*)
- Carers approval terminated (due to concerns) 0 (*1 in 2014*)
- Carers approval terminated (retirement and resignation.) 9 (*12 in 2014*)

Activities since January 2015

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 2015, Southend Fostering Service has coordinated and supported the following activities in conjunction with the Southend Foster Families Community:

- 150 children & foster carers went to the Pantomime with funds raised by The Events Team and Foster Carers.
- Throughout Jan, Feb & March, the Foster carers met up monthly at The Coffee Morning / Support Group and donated clean and used clothing which was sold to raise extra Funds for activities - this raised £90.00
- SFFC held a Home Made Cake Sale at the Civic Centre on 6th March which raised £230 with an extra generous donation of £100 from a foster carer.
- The Grand National sweepstake held on 11th April 2015 raised £163.00.

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 2015 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, 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.

In November 2015, 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.

In 2014 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.

Unfortunately due to the difficulties within this year's cohort, results were not what had been hoped, with some young people just missing their expected grades. They are now being supported in further education.

Karen Collard, Virtual Headteacher

CAMHS support to Foster Carers

Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Looked after Children

Our new senior MH worker joined the team in June 2015, with a remit to address the emotional health and wellbeing of the Borough's looked after children.

Between June and September she received thirty-five referrals highlighting the great need for additional resources focused in this area.

Work undertaken so far has included:

- 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.
- Family group work, co-work with David Britton, Clinical Lead of Marigold.
- 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 CAMHS.
- Crisis Intervention Work.
- Planning and development work on Therapeutic Plans and a Fostering Handbook – a reference guide for foster parents.
- Attendance at Group Clinical Supervision and Coffee Mornings.

Karen writes:

My recommendation for the further development of this service is that we work towards a trauma-informed foster parent group that have enhanced skills in addressing 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 quarter 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. Focus on the training and on-going professional development of the foster parents.
6. Implement the therapeutic plans for those children identified as in need of therapeutic input.
7. Introduce the 'Theraplay' re-parenting approach and neural & sensory integration techniques to the foster parents.
8. 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.
9. Attend Clinical Group Supervision and coffee mornings to offer advice and guidance.

10. Promote and co-ordinate the LAC Forum, held at the site of the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service [CAMHS], Rochford Hospital, chaired by Jackie Dennis, CAMHS Team Manager.
11. Explore an opportunity to set up a LAC Support Group for older children.
12. Explore alternative interventions which may support children's emotional health and wellbeing needs.
13. Offer consultation and advice to the social work teams, supervising social workers and foster parents via the telephone and/or a drop-in service at Crowborough House.

Karen Eves

Senior Mental Health Social Worker

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 2014 looking specifically at issues raised by carers in autumn 2012 and 2013. This showed:

- An increase of 20% 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 also a huge increase of 19.5%
- There was a 6% decrease in those carers who feel listened to properly
- A further increase of 4% of those who responded who said that they were always or usually invited to relevant meetings (100%) and none who said they were rarely or never invited.
- 93% of carers who responded said that communication with the fostering is always or usually good.
- When asked the same of the child care teams, there was a decrease of 21% from 2013 but an on-going increase from 2012 of 18%.
- In 2013 there was an increase of 26.5% of carers who felt that the quality of Placement Agreement meetings had improved and in 2014 there was a further

And

- An increase in the number of carers who felt that we match children well of 25% to 66%. No carers felt pressurised into taking placements, a fantastic achievement. 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 2015 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.

A further survey was sent out in early November 2015 and the full outcome of this survey will be reported in the 2016 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 2015 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 carers decided this year to change the name to "community", to encourage new carers to feel a part of something special. This has proven very successful with more carers now becoming involved in the meetings.

'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 2015 the numbers of young people in staying put arrangements has increased from 22 to 28. 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 28 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 will be working hard in 2016 to continue to increase high quality supported accommodation locally.

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. 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 2015, 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 37% 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 slightly in 2015.

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.

The Interfaith Group was attended on 14th January 2015 and a good response was received. The Church Network is now actively incorporating private fostering into their safeguarding training. All Children's Social Care Teams were sent refresher information in January 2015 and there is on-going work to ensure a clear response to any private fostering arrangements. The Central Locality Information Sharing Network was attended on 29th April and information contained on SHIP will now also be updated by the Locality Information Officer. A presentation was made to a well-attended LSCB Safeguarding in Schools Forum on 4th March 2015 leading to two immediate referrals by Cecil Jones College.

A piece was written for inclusion in education's 'The Weekly Newsletter' for schools in order to catch a wider audience following half term. The Newsletter is posted on the Southend Learning Network and is a high profile document for schools. This is also distributed internally to those who work in schools and therefore hits a higher target audience.

Follow up meetings with Val Smith (Senior Knowledge & Information Advisor) are being held to progress effective targeting of community groups via information held on the Mosaic System

The Healthy Schools Meeting was attended on 03/07/2015

Sarah Range (Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Service Manager) arranged for a private fostering talk to be incorporated into new staff induction training.

Links have been obtained regarding admissions personnel in school given the changes to schools taking their own admissions to highlight private fostering arrangements at point of school application and information will be cascaded to these individuals specifically around private fostering.

A new Private Fostering Action Plan 2015-16 is now in place with further promotional activities.

Planned activity for 2016:

To link with Southend Airport to discuss processes when children/young people are accompanied by people that are not close family to detect child trafficking and develop protocols.

Special Guardianship Orders:

The first SGO Support Group was held on 16th April 15 and was attended by nine Special Guardian's with a second held in June 2015. The first session was facilitated but group led and the discussions were vibrant and focused. Initial feedback suggests that the participants enjoyed the opportunity to meet and that they experienced similar experiences both pre and post the making of the SGO. The second meeting was attended by the Group Manager who chairs the Southend SGO panel where there was a lively debate regarding all areas of support. A new SGO Newsletter will be used to share information and as an invite to each support group in future.

Participants want 3 monthly groups and would welcome outside speakers on various issues and access to training opportunities which are now being routinely incorporated into SGO Support Plans. We are in the process of implementing a system of sending children certificates to celebrate the making of their SGO's and in

ensuring that on the granting of an SGO the Special Guardian will receive a routine first visit. Implementing a first visit by the lead officer for SGO's is in response to Special Guardians telling us of feeling isolated and apprehensive once Social Care intervention has ceased.

Conclusion

The past year has been a busy time in the Fostering Service. New ideas have moved the service forward to ensure that it is always child focused in its thinking. There has been an embedding of new practices and electronic working.

We still have a few challenges for 2016:

- 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
- To further develop a cost effective, professional and forward thinking fostering service
- To embed the new therapeutic care plan
- To embed new procedures for long term linking to ensure quality assurance

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.