

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	4 February 2020
Title:	Update on Hampshire Fostering Services
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update for the Children and Families Advisory Panel on the work of the fostering service over the past twelve months. This report will look at the progress and developments made within the service, to support stable and appropriate placements for children in care, with in house foster carers. Lastly, the report considers plans for continued improvements to the service.

Recommendation

2. That the Children and Families Advisory Panel note the update on Hampshire Fostering Services.

Executive Summary

3. This report seeks to;
 - Provide an update of progress over the last twelve months of the performance of the fostering service.
 - Provide headline data from the 2019 foster carers' survey.
 - Inform the Panel of the current work regarding fostering under the Modernising Placements Programme in foster carer payments, recruitment and marketing and culture and values work.
 - Provide an update of the work of placement stability workers within the fostering service.

Contextual Information

4. In April 2019, the launch of the new Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt South, required us to make changes to the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Team. Previously, the team was responsible for the recruitment of both foster carers and adopters, whilst this change resulted in the adoption function transferring to Adopt South and a new team dedicated to the recruitment and assessment of foster carers for Hampshire. The changes also saw the recruitment of a new Team Manager and a new Marketing Officer.

5. Fostering Service Structure

There are four teams under the Fostering Service:

- Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team – this team is responsible for marketing, recruiting new foster carers and completing assessments for foster carer applicants.
- Fostering Team East – this team is responsible for supporting foster carers, following their approval, in the East of the county.
- Fostering Team West - this team is responsible for supporting foster carers, following their approval, in the West of the county.
- Connected Carers Assessment Team – This team consists of an Assistant Team Manager (ATM) and a Children and Families Support Worker. The team coordinates all of the assessments of those wider family members, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, who offer to look after children when their parents cannot. The assessments themselves are undertaken by either Social Workers based in our area social work teams or by Independent Social Workers. The ATM is responsible for allocating work to the assessing Social Workers and working with the Team Managers in the districts to provide expert advice regarding fostering regulations. The ATM also oversees all work completed by the Independent Social Workers.

Performance Data

6. The performance of the service is reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that the care that our children receive is of high quality and that carers are receiving the support that they need in order to provide this. Below is a summary of some of the main performance areas for the service.

- At the end of June 2019 there were 480 registered foster carers in Hampshire compared to 493 last quarter. This is a decrease of 13 foster carers between June 2019 and September 2019. This is made up of County Foster Carers (who are not related to or have an existing relationship with a child prior to placement), Connected Foster Carers (who have a relationship with the child) and Specialist Respite Carers (who provide short break care to disabled children). This decrease in

the number of foster carers mirrors the national shortage of foster carers and a challenging time for foster carer recruitment. This has been discussed in depth in both Sir Martin Narey's report 'Foster Care in England' 2018 and the 'State of the Nation' Report 2019. In Hampshire in the past 12 months (September 2018-September 2019) there was a decrease of 42 fostering households, (28 County Carers, 12 connected carers and two specialist respite carers). The majority of the reasons for carers leaving Hampshire however is not due to dissatisfaction with the service they received but mainly due to personal circumstances such as moving out of area, family commitments and retirement.

- Foster carer approvals have fallen over the last 3 years with 35 new fostering households approved in 2018-19. The recruitment of foster carers is a primary focus for the service and forms a significant part of the Modernising Placements Programme later discussed in point 7.
- Foster Carers are required to have an Annual Household Review to review their fostering registration under the fostering regulations to ensure they continue to meet the required expectations under the fostering standards. The completion of Household Reviews has improved to 82.5% within timescales; this compares to 57% in September 2018 demonstrating a significant improvement.
- Foster carers are required to receive regular supervision with the minimum frequency in Hampshire set to every six weeks. 83% of foster carer households received timely, recorded supervision in December 2019; this compares to 74% in December 2018, again a significant improvement.
- The service is also required to undertake annual unannounced visits to carers. The performance for this indicator has seen a dramatic improvement since last year with only 24 households overdue due an unannounced visit in September 2019 compared to 111 the same time in 2018.

Foster Carers Survey results 2019

7. In May 2019, the Fostering Service undertook the annual foster carers' survey.

Highlights of this survey were:

- Overall, 75% of carers reported they were able to access the training that is needed to support children in their care.
- 64% of foster carers were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality and quantity of support from the Fostering Service, this is equal to the response last year regarding satisfaction with the Fostering teams.

- There has been an increase in the satisfaction reported from foster carers in relation to the support they receive from children's social workers. In 2017/18 foster carers were asked how they rated the Children's teams' ongoing support. 29% rated this support as 'good' or 'very good' with 45% rating this support as 'okay'. In comparison for this year, 47% of foster carers rated their satisfaction with children's social workers as 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' which is a significant increase on last year. These responses are not exactly comparable due to the different response options; however, it does provide an indication of an improvement in an area that remains a high priority for focus for the year ahead. A number of initiatives are planned to support this improvement going forward.
- Another related area within the results of the annual survey where we need to focus our efforts is the relationships between the department and foster carers with this year's annual survey results showing that 41% of respondents felt 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' when rating whether they felt valued as a professional. A further 22% rated their satisfaction as 'neutral' and 31% 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'. This has informed the culture and values work discussed in point 10.1 of this report.

Modernising Placements

8. In House Fostering is a specific area of work within the wider 'Modernising Placements Programme'. This programme is being led by a dedicated senior manager to look at how we meet the care needs of our children across all placement types. This programme commenced in October 2019 and follows on from work that was undertaken since 2017 including foster carer surveys, work with Hampshire Fostering Network (HFN) and a foster carer workshop that was held in June 2019. Foster carers have been very positive about this programme of work to date and are actively involved in the development. Further reports providing detail about this work will be provided when the programme has matured.
9. The main objective for the fostering review project is to increase the number of Hampshire foster carers through improving and enhancing the offer from Hampshire from the very first point of contact through to the point where a foster carer leave. The project is divided into the following workstreams:
 - Enquiry – including marketing messages that are optimal to attract potential applicants and our customer service
 - Assessment – including reviewing our process, timescales, criteria for being a foster carer in Hampshire
 - Placement – including skills fees (payments to carers), reviewing what other local authorities and national agencies are doing from which we

can learn, and our partnerships with independent fostering agencies

- Retention – including the training and support we provide
- Culture and Values

Culture and Values Work

10. The area of culture and values has been included in the Modernising Placements Programme in recognition of foster carers stating that they want to feel more valued and a part of the professional team around the child.

11. An action plan has been identified which includes;

- Foster Carer involvement in district participation events.
- Improving relationships between Districts, Fostering and Foster Carers through joint training and foster carer involvement in Children's Services peer inspections.
- Increased understanding of roles/joint working.
- Improved working together at the start of new children's placements through placement planning meetings.
- Shared learning opportunities.
- Increased understanding of the fostering role.

10. This action plan is in its implementation stage, and has started to be delivered in several areas through:

- Foster carers have now joined peer inspection teams.
- New guidance created and issued regarding placement planning meeting recording and information that needs to be provided at the start of new Children's placements.
- District participation events have included foster carers.
- A presentation of the fostering role has been delivered to all managers and district staff.
- Bite-size learning in the districts have been extended to include foster carers.

- A new communication distribution list is being set up to improve direct communication with foster carers.
- A planned quarterly newsletter for foster carers to start in April 2020.

Foster Carer Payments

11. Foster carers had previously communicated to the department that accurate and timely foster carer payments were a problem for several foster carers and were impacting retention. Under the Modernising Placements Programme a Rapid Improvement Event was held in November 2019 to tackle this specific issue.
12. There are several recommendations from this event that are currently in process to improve the timeliness and accuracy of foster carer payments which include shorter term improvements as well as longer term planning for the future.

Marketing

13. In Quarter 2 (July-September 2019) there were some branding changes implemented. Whilst Finding Homes for Hampshire Children remains the overarching identity for fostering and adoption, the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment team are utilising a tweaked branding logo - Fostering Hampshire Children. This is to reflect the specific role of this service following the separation of the fostering and adoption recruitment functions.

14. Hampshire Fostering team introduced a 'Foster Focus' week in October 2019. During this week there was increased marketing online, on the radio and in print. There were daily events at different venues across the county. This resulted in a higher number of enquiries that week that have converted into a number of assessments.



**Foster
Focus
Week**

28 October – 3 November 2019

15. Further changes to the recruitment strategy and marketing material are in progress as a result of work from the corporate Insight and Engagement Team. They have undertaken Mosaic profiling to support the team to market recruitment messages to the most likely household that match values, skills and experience that we are looking for to meet the needs of Hampshire children.

Placement Stability Workers

16. In February 2019, a new role was developed using existing staff to support foster carers and improve the placement stability of children. It was envisaged that these Placement Stability workers (PSW) would be tasked to provide time limited support, at times when carers needed it most and focussed on

the presenting need or behaviour that had the potential to cause the placement to become unstable.

17. Reporting in October 2019, it was found that they had effectively stabilised placements in 53% of the cases that had been referred. These are all children that may have otherwise needed a placement move. The feedback on the work from foster carers and professionals has been positive. There is still more work to do to continue building relationships with teams and foster carers and encourage referrals at the earliest opportunity to enable support.
18. The service has aims for future working that will allow PSWs to reach more foster carers at earlier stages. The aim over the next six months is for PSWs to become involved with foster carers at an earlier stage of difficulty rather than at crisis to work towards a higher level of placements stabilising following PSW involvement.

First Fostering Get Together

19. In November 2019, the Fostering Service held a 'Foster Carer Get Together' event. This was a social event for foster carers to come together from across the county in a relaxed environment. We were joined by over 45 foster carers and some managers from the service for social activities and lunch. We were able to provide foster carers with an update on our development work within the service under the Modernising Placements Programme as well as provided foster carers with an opportunity to socialise and build peer relationships. We are aware that many independent fostering agencies provide opportunities for social gatherings and this was very well received. Here are a few feedback comments from foster carers:

- *'Amazing event yesterday. So much effort and thought had gone into it, from shopping, catering, quiz, bingo, activities for children - all was fantastic. Loved that managers socialised with everyone, not just those they knew'.*
- *'A great big thank you for your idea of today, it was a great success, many carers agree it was so needed to meet up and share'.*
- *'This was fantastic I thought. Great turn out considering the weather and out of the way location. HCC put in so much effort to make it a fun and relaxed get together. Feeling the love'.*
- *'Was a real breath of fresh air from HCC. Please send our thanks through HFN and let them know that it would be nice if it was more regular!'*

Conclusion

20. The performance of the Fostering Service continues to be a focus of the department, and whilst there has been improvement made in the timeliness of Household Reviews and supervision recording, there has been a decline in

the number of approved foster carers over the past twelve months. Therefore, recruitment and retention is a current priority and is at the forefront of all the current development work.

21. The Foster Carers' Survey evidenced some improvement in foster carer satisfaction in regard to working relationships with Children's Social Workers with more work to do. It also highlighted that further work is required on foster carers feeling that they are treated as professionals and this had led the action planning in the culture and values workstream. A further survey will be conducted in May 2020.
22. A programme of work 'Modernising Placements' commenced in October 2019. This is a 12-month programme which has already informed marketing, website and branding refresh and has started work on foster carer payments and culture and values work.
23. The Fostering Service introduced Placement Stability Workers in February 2019, which has been positive and seen intensive work to stabilise children's placements at times of difficulty, preventing children's placement moves where possible.
24. The Fostering Service held its first foster carers' 'get together'; a social and networking event for foster carers which was very well received, and a further event will be planned this year.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	No
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	No
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes
OR	
This proposal does not link to the Strategic Plan but, nevertheless, requires a decision because:	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This report provides an update on the overall work of the fostering service and is not proposing changes that would lead to an impact on groups with protected characteristics.