

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

10 October 2016

ANNUAL REPORT OF FOSTERING PANEL

Report of the Strategic Service Manager

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform board members about the work of the Fostering Panel over the period from April 2015 to April 2016.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Fostering Regulations 2013, Part 5, sets out the requirements of all fostering agencies with regard to the role, responsibilities and memberships of Panels. In summary, the role of the Fostering Panel is to consider the full approval variation of approval and termination of approval of anyone either seeking to be approved as or currently approved as Foster Carers, who wish to care for children and young people up to the age of 18 years. This includes family and friends, otherwise known as 'Connected Carers' who have had children placed with them under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010. In addition, Fostering Panels also have a duty to consider the annual review of foster carers.

3. Main Points

- 3.1 **The current Independent Chair of the two fostering panels assumed her role in July 2015**

Foster Carer Review

- 3.2 The first annual review of foster carers is presented to Panel and the backlog has now reduced significantly. There continues to be a challenge for Panel in respect of the quality of the information that is collated within the review reports and a number of annual reviews have had to be deferred. Between April 1st 2015 and March 2016 there were 21 first annual reviews presented to the Panel, of which 12 were deferred. Common themes leading to deferment have been:
- Approved foster carers not having completed the required mandatory training and the Training Support and development Standards (TSDS) portfolio. The TSDS should be completed within 12 months of approval unless a relative has been approved as a Connected Carer, in which case it is 18 months.

- Recommendations from annual reviews have not been actioned in the required timescales and remain outstanding when the review is presented to Panel.
- 3.3 The Panel Advisors have escalated these concerns to the Independent reviewing Service. Panel are yet to see any marked improvement and continue to question why the ongoing approval of a carer is recommended when Fostering Standards are not met.

Agency Decision Maker

- 3.4 There is an Interim Head of Service for Looked After Children in post who assumes the role of Agency Decision Maker. Following Ofsted inspection last year and in order to address some of the concerns raised by Ofsted, the Agency Decision Maker now meets with the Chair of the Fostering Panel on a quarterly basis to discuss matters arising from Panel business. This has proved to be a useful forum to not only explore particular challenges but also to consider a way forward to strengthen Panel arrangements. As a consequence, Practitioners and Managers now appear to understand the expectations of Panel. Where these are not met then an agenda item could potentially be deferred. It is important that the information presented to Panel is sufficient to be able to reach an informed recommendation. The Agency Decision Maker also adds an extra element of quality assurance.

Delegated Authority

- 3.5 Delegated Authority is now in place and training has been provided to carers and staff with respect to this. The matter of Delegated Authority remains a challenge as it is often the case when prospective 'Connected Carers' attend Panel they have received documentation that informs them of the decisions they can make on behalf of the child. The absence of Delegated Authority does not prohibit someone from being approved as a 'Connected Carer.' The guidance and required documentation about Delegated Authority has been re-issued to staff and the Independent Reviewing Service have added Delegated Authority to their required checklist at Childrens Reviews and Foster Carer Reviews.

Recruitment

- 3.6 CREO have been assisting in developing the new foster carer recruitment campaign which is about to be launched. We have a number of looked after young people attending Information Sessions for prospective Foster Carers. They have come up with a question for Panel Members to ask applicants: "What would you do if you were struggling in your role as a Foster Carer?" This question is now asked of all applicants. The young people have also been involved in the fostering campaign posters.

Panel Members Profile

- 3.7 Panel Members Profile is currently being developed. This will provide applicants with details of the membership of Panel and the purpose and function of Panel and hopefully alleviate some anxieties for people attending the Fostering Panel.

Elected Member

- 3.8 There is no longer a requirement under the Fostering Regulations to have an elected member on Panel; however it is noted that such membership is beneficial, given that elected members are representatives of the 'Corporate Parent.' Cllr Iain Kay currently sits on one of the Fostering Panels.

Training for Panel Members

- 3.9 Panel Members received training from BAAF during September 2015 and a further training event is scheduled for later this year to focus upon 'Allegations Management.' Panel Members have also attended Regulation 24 Training which was cascaded across the teams following the outcome of the Ofsted inspection.

Appraisals

- 3.10 Yearly appraisals have taken place with Panel Members who are positive about being asked to express their opinions and views.

Terms of Reference

- 3.11 The Constitution and Terms of Reference of Panel has been revised and was implemented in December 2015.

Checklist

- 3.12 A Quality Assurance Checklist is now in place to ensure that any documents / reports that are presented to the Panel are of a high quality.

De-Registration

- 3.13 Panel now routinely consider the outcome of Deregistration Management Meetings, where Foster Carers have been under investigations. There has been a significant improvement in this area of work. We have had 43 De-Registrations of Foster Carers – this is a high level and reflects that Connected Carers have secured a Legal Order to end the Looked After status of the children they are caring for. In addition when Foster Carers approval ends a De-Registration Report must be taken to Fostering Panel.

Fostering Officers

- 3.14 Foster Carers continue to be supported by their Fostering Officers and receive supervision from them on a regular basis. Their training and development is also considered at these sessions. There is mandatory training in the first year (Training Support and Development Standards). There is an expectation that Foster Carers keep a portfolio of training they have completed and this is considered at their annual review.

Panel Advisor

- 3.15 Each Panel has a dedicated Panel Advisor whose role is to advise Panel on regulations, guidance, policies and procedures. This role is assumed by the two Team Managers of the Fostering Service.

Business Meetings

- 3.16 These should take place twice a year. There has been some difficulty fulfilling this requirement due to Panel Members availability to attend and competing demands. A Business Meeting was held last year which enabled the Agency Decision Maker to give members an overview of the Revised Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Fostering Panel. A future meeting is scheduled to take place on 19th December 2016.

Connected Carers

- 3.17 The biggest challenge for the Fostering Panel has been a major increase in the number of Connected Carers. We currently have 34 Connected Carers and 37 regulation 24 assessments taking place. There has been a variation in the quality of these assessments and Panel has routinely queried why assessments have not been completed within the required timescale of 16 weeks (a further 8 weeks can be granted under Regulation 25). Panel have deferred items due to the non-attendance of the Child's Social Worker at Panel and because of gaps in written information. Panel have also questioned whether the extension of 8 weeks under Regulation 25 has been submitted and then approved by the Agency Decision Maker, as this is not always clear.

4. Future Developments

- 4.1 Performance Information. There is a need for further discussion regarding IT systems in order that the accuracy of the Fostering Service can be collated and performance management information obtained to assist with service requirements and development. We are currently looking at a new computer system which should significantly improve our collation of data.
- 4.2 Panel Members remain keen to invite a previously Looked After young person to be a Panel Member. This needs to be progressed within the next two months.

- 4.3 A review of the Annual Foster Carer Review template is to take place and the Panel Members profile is to be developed. The Foster Carers recruitment campaign will be launched and a review of the fee structure for Foster Carers will take place.
- 4.4 Consideration is to be given to Foster Carers attending Panel following their first Annual Review and to increase the membership of the 'central list' further.
- 4.5 The Panel to continue working towards holding two Business Meetings annually and all Panel Members are to be issued with an I-Pad which will enable panel papers to be accessed via a secure portal. This should also speed up the process of members receiving 'panel packs' and simultaneously reducing the cost to the Local Authority, as it currently can cost up to £25.00 for each pack of panel papers to be sent to individual Panel Members via Recorded Delivery.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to note the content of this report.

