

From: Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 20 March 2017

Subject: **PLACEMENT STABILITY – 'SENSE OF BELONGING'**

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report outlines the Kent offer to foster carers to create and provide increased placement stability. There are three components of the newly developed 'Sense of Belonging' offer; this offer creates choices for foster carers, children and young people that allows them to consider what will provide the best opportunities for children to thrive and develop in their placements and prevent further disruption. Kent Fostering Service proposes the implementation of additional support for their most vulnerable fostering placements, where additional pressures upon the foster carers mean there is a higher risk of a placement breakdown.

Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on the content of the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A key issue for the fostering service and Children in Care Teams has been the need to focus on supporting and improving placement stability. This is to ensure that looked after children experience long term stable placements where they can achieve good outcomes and reach their full potential. There are those children and young people for whom their early life experiences have meant that they can be challenging for carers. Kent has recognised the need to enhance foster care resilience in caring for children. As the complexity of children's needs increase, the service response from Specialist Children's Services (SCS) must meet these needs. The aim will be to improve placement stability across the county, alongside improving children and young people's opportunities for development, supporting them to increase their self-esteem and assisting them to return to full time education.
- 1.2 There has been consideration of feedback provided from foster carers and children which has then informed the development of the Sense of Belonging offer.

2. Contents

2.1 This report outlines three offers to carers and to children. The offer can be used as either a single entity offer or, for our most challenging children, a combination of two or more options to support placement stability.

The criteria for accessing this additional package will be based on:

- Children/young people who have had three plus placement moves
- Children/young people out of education or excluded
- Children/young people on a part time timetable
- Children/young people at risk of missing/Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Placements assessed at risk of breakdown where the package is identified as a support to maintain the placement at the stability core group.
- For children with complex needs as an offer of support within the referral and matching, particularly for children coming from a placement breakdown, including Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA).

2.2 The offer of support will consist of three options.

2.2.1 Option 1

This will be an initial four month package of support, using the council's outdoor activity centres to offer day activities and overnight residential weekends.

- Month One – Two introduction days at either Swattenden Centre or Bewl Water
- Month Two – A one-night residential weekend (that includes two full days of activities and an overnight stay on the Saturday night)
- Month Three - A one-night residential weekend (that includes two full days of activities and an overnight stay on the Saturday night)
- Month Four – A two-night residential weekend (Friday and Saturday) or break in the school holidays.

The outdoor activities will be staffed by trained instructors supported by youth workers to provide supervision and pastoral care to the children, including overnight support. Due to the facilities being in the West of the county, transport will be provided from a central collection point to enable all children/young people to have access and ensure that foster carers are able to have a full day or weekend break from caring.

Outcomes for Children

The offer of support will aim to give children and young people an opportunity to try new activities and these can be provided specific to their individual interests and learning needs. For children experiencing difficulties within their education, the aim would be for them to build on their self-esteem and confidence at being in a group, with the aim to reintegrate them back into full time education. For those children that would view going to a different foster carer for respite as a negative, it will give an alternative option for overnight stays, to enable foster carers to have a break, without the child feeling they are being sent away.

Outcomes for Foster Carers

The main aim of the offer is to increase placement stability for the child, by being able to enable the foster carer to have regular breaks from the pressure of the caring role. For the carer to know that they have planned breaks over a four month period, it will aim to stabilise the placement and prevent placement breakdown. For foster carers who have a number of children in their care and/or birth children, it will give them opportunities to plan individual time for these children.

2.2.2 Option 2

This involves the provision of dedicated foster carer hub families, which provide regular respite care. For some children and young people, the provision of support through outdoor activity centres will not meet their needs and they may struggle in a group setting. These children/young people will need a family based support package which will be based on research from the Mockingbird Project¹ and Kent's pilot in East Kent of the 4x4 model/Adolescent Wrap Around Project. This model will identify one fostering support family as the "dedicated family hub" within each of the seven fostering teams, who will work intensively with three fostering households to provide care for three children or young people. This will include the provision of weekly day care support and capacity for overnight respite stays, including the ability to respond in an emergency. The aim is to create a "hub family" who become like extended family members to the child, offering them stability and care when the main foster carer needs a break. At times of particular stress, such as a young person being out of education or regularly at risk of going missing, support can be increased by the hub family to minimise the risk of placement breakdown. Each child/young person would have an individual package of support, which will include some monthly overnight respite stays.

Outcomes for Children

The hub family will become part of the children's support network, being able to become similar to extended family members by providing a familiar home environment where the child feels safe. It will provide an alternative safe adult to assist the main carer to provide a sense of stability. The hub family will have capacity to respond in an emergency, for example when a child is excluded from school, and is able to work with the child's care plan in assisting with educational activities in partnership with Virtual School Kent (VSK).

Outcomes for Foster Carers

The main aim of the offer is to increase placement stability for the child by being able to enable the foster carer to have regular breaks from the pressure of the caring role. The main carer will have identified planned breaks, whether this is day care or overnight stays, and the aim is to stabilise the placement and prevent placement breakdown. For foster carers who have a number of children in their care and/or birth children, it will give them opportunities to plan individual time for these children. It uses the concept of a dedicated 'hub home'

¹ The Mockingbird Society developed the model in USA(see fostering network.org.uk)

of specially recruited and trained carers offering respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. For example, a respite carer will respond to texts and phone calls from other foster carers. They may also have a problem they want to talk about and the respite carer is there to help them sound out, and offer advice (not dissimilar to the carers group). They also offer more practical support, picking up from school and respite (called sleepovers).

2.2.3 Option 3

The new service model for therapeutic support

The proposal is to commission a county-wide service for children and young people in care, placed within in-house foster placements. The aim is to increase placement stability and reduce the number of placement disruptions. The vision for the service is to create a Fostering Sense of Stability Service. This new service will provide clinical psychology input to the in-house fostering supervising social workers, foster carers and the children/young people. This service will be supported by two dedicated support workers who already are in place supporting the existing Therapeutic Re-Parenting scheme. Currently there is no access to immediate support and intervention from clinical psychology services.

The overarching aims of this part of the Sense of Belonging are:

- To ensure there is provision of clinical psychology support to children in care at times of crisis and placement instability
- To intervene at the earliest possible stage, in the most appropriate manner, to prevent the escalation of behaviour and support the emotional and/or mental health needs of children and young people
- To support the children and foster carers who accessed psychological support through the Therapeutic Re-Parenting (TRP) service by facilitating network meetings and support groups for the period July 2017–March 2018 (maximum of eight children). The TRP contract ends in June 2017; the termination of this contract has provided the opportunity to consider how the psychological support to placements might be commissioned differently, to include a larger cohort of children and carers
- By providing practical approaches to caring for children in crisis, foster carers will develop skills and knowledge
- To identify and offer support to children and young people displaying trauma and behaviour that is impacting upon the stability of the fostering household
- To effect improved joint working arrangements with providers of emotional wellbeing and mental health services
- To reduce the numbers of high-cost IFA placements by supporting in-house foster carers at times of crisis, to avoid the placement breaking down.

2.3 Strategic context

This proposal aligns with the Strategic Outcome – ‘children and young people get the best start in life’. The wider vision will be to further develop a clinical

psychology hub that includes those services available for post adoption and consider the mental health offer to care leavers.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 The fostering service believes that this Sense of Belonging offer is making a difference and will further develop as hub families are recruited and the contract for the bespoke psychology service commences. Increased support will be provided to foster carers, children and young people. The impact of the Sense of Belonging offer will be monitored through feedback from carers and children, along with the performance data on placement stability.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on the content of the report.

5. Background Documents

- 5.1 None

6. Contact details

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