

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 21 July 2017

Subject: **THE KENT FOSTERING BUSINESS PLAN**

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary: The Kent Fostering Service has updated the fostering Business Plan for 2017-2018. This outlines the work plan for the next year and incorporates the overall aims of the service plan for Specialist Children's Services.

Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **DISCUSS** and **APPROVE** the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2017-2018.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Business Plan (Attached as Appendix 1) ensures compliance with the Fostering Regulations and the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

2. Body of the Report

2.1 Kent Fostering is made up of seven fostering supervising social work support teams, and a centralised fostering service which covers the recruitment and assessment of foster carers (including Connected Persons); the specialised team for disabled children's fostering, Fostering Review Team and foster carer training and development. The Kent Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Fostering, who has direct management responsibility for the centralised teams, the standards of the fostering service and is the registered fostering manager. There is matrix management for the staff within the support teams, line management provided by Service Managers in locality areas, and oversight and quality assurance in place by the Head of Service. The aim of the service is to provide a range of high quality, appropriate foster placements that meet both the National Minimum Standards (2011) and the requirements set out in care planning regulations and also ensure the best possible outcomes for Kent's Children in Care. As at the end of May 2017 the Kent Fostering Service has 778 available registered foster carers (excluding Suspended and Relief Carers) caring for 1035 children.

2.2 The service has been through a significant period of innovation, supported by Newton Europe, to identify areas for improvement ensuring the utilisation of foster carers, minimising vacancies and enhancing the processes in place to match children both locally and across the county. Each support team has

focused on ensuring maximum use of in-house vacancies and that foster carers have the skills and knowledge required to maintain their registration. In the years 2014-16 there was a focus on having carers registered who were actively fostering and committed to working with the department. This has meant a number of foster carers have been deregistered due to being unable to take the children requiring placements, not actively fostering for prolonged periods and/or not meeting the requirements set out in fostering regulations. This has meant a reduction in the number of registered foster carers over the last 2 years; however the foster carers who are registered with Kent are the right foster carers with the skills and knowledge required to provide high quality placements.

- 2.3 The numbers of foster carers in Kent, and the numbers of carers approved and de-registered from May 2015 to May 2017, is shown in the tables attached to this report as Appendix 2.

3. Context: Strengths and Challenges

- 3.1 A new permanent Head of Fostering was appointed in June 2016. This appointment has provided strengthened leadership and focus to the Fostering Service and was acknowledged as an area of significant strength in the recent Ofsted inspection.
- 3.2 In tandem with the changes at senior leadership there was also a request from the Corporate Parenting Select Committee in February 2016 that an Independent Fostering Review be undertaken to ensure that the standard of foster care provision is safe, adequately meets the needs of Looked After Children in the care of Kent Foster Carers and ensures appropriate matching of carers and children. The Independent Review was completed in June 2016 and identified areas that were already the focus for the Fostering Service, but significantly, and helpfully, has contributed to increasing the pace of change and providing a framework for developing and improving the service.
- 3.3 Key areas for development identified for the service following the Independent Fostering Review (June 2016) that have been achieved are:
- A clear structure and clarity of expectations for supervision of managers, social workers and foster carers in the Fostering Service.
 - Allegation investigations are not only completed but there is follow up social work to support carers and children to manage post allegations. Improvement in the timeliness of returning to panel with reports containing increased analysis and clear recommendations of next steps. Workshops on allegations and complaints have been delivered to all team managers, with the development of a flowchart, a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) notification form and an agreed process for the recording of allegations. A learning culture has been developed in the Service, with learning from Serious Case Reviews and complaints now embedded into Management Meetings and disseminated to the teams and to foster carers.

- Implementation of the Fostering Review Team, to provide independent focus and challenge in the completion of foster carers' reviews.
- Improved practice in relation to placement matching, including clarity and training in respect of purpose and use of delegated authority. Online training on the Care Planning Regulations and the 2015 updates was re-launched in February 2017. A new referral form, delegated authority, matching, risk assessment and placement arrangements format has been implemented to have all the key information within one document.
- Quality Assurance and management oversight to ensure that the quality of practice supports the performance management statistical returns.
- Paperless panels have been fully implemented across all six fostering panels.
- The streamlining of the process for both permanency cases and Connected Persons Assessments has been fully implemented, with the aim of reducing paperwork and achieving a clear process and focus on early permanency planning for children.

3.4 The Kent Fostering Service has an updated Business Plan for 2017-2018 which has been developed to support the delivery of a good fostering service and which will be reviewed quarterly. The Business Plan has been developed in conjunction with feedback from the Kent Foster Carers Association (KFCA), the Independent Fostering Review (June 2016) as well as areas highlighted by Ofsted that could be further developed. The business plan has been shared with all staff and has been welcomed throughout the service as it provides staff with clarity about their roles as well as Service priorities. The quality of social work practice is supported by the Kent performance management systems and this has included the development of a Team Operational Dashboard (TOD) and Fostering Scorecard with data available at both a team and individual level. Fostering activity can be tracked by managers with a focus on measuring progress in meeting Fostering Regulatory requirements. Some additional measures have been included to ensure that there is senior management oversight of allegations and complaints and the timeliness of their completion.

4. Progressing Success

- 4.1 Recruitment of Foster Carers is an ongoing challenge, with the Local Authority competing with a high number of Independent Fostering Agencies within the county. Initial enquiries have reduced considerably during 2016/17 and a number of methods have been used to address this including increasing the number of information events, enhanced use of social media including live web chats and use of Facebook and Twitter.
- 4.2 A new recruitment campaign with an updated brand image has been developed and is being used in all the recruitment of Foster Carers marketing. This also utilises the Kent County Council logo so that there is greater emphasis on the benefits of fostering for Kent as opposed to the independent sector. This was

launched in September 2016, with a targeted campaign to ensure Kent Fostering has a greater presence within the local community. Key advertising strategies include placing banners in prominent places, increased profile with local papers, a leaflet drop and roundabout advertising as well as the use of social media including Twitter.

- 4.3 There is a recruitment strategy which is tracking impact and this is twinned with all areas having specific input into the recruitment plan/target to identify any specific local challenges. Foster Carers continue to be a significant strength, with word of mouth a strong method of recruitment, rewarded by a bounty payment to recognise carer's contribution to expanding the service. Experienced Foster Carers are part of all information events and enhance presentations by sharing the rewards of being a Foster Carer for the Kent Fostering Service. Media training and workshops have been provided to carers to ensure the voice of carers is strong within the local community.
- 4.4 New recruitment material from September 2016.



- 4.5 A key strength of the service is the Training and Development for Foster Carers, which has a clear structure for their career and includes pre approval training "Skills to Foster" through to qualifications at both Diploma and BTEC level.
- 4.6 All Foster Carers have a personal development plan, with a clear structure for newly approved carers in Years 1 and 2, working towards enhanced courses further in their career. There is a variety of online and direct training, alongside local support groups which ensure varied methods for adult learning. Mandatory training has been introduced on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and PREVENT to ensure Foster Carers are fully informed about these specific areas of the work.
- 4.7 Young people who are former Care Leavers are included at the early stages of recruitment and throughout the training programme. They assist with the young people's interview panels for new applicants, provide participation training and there is also the opportunity for them to be panel members
- 4.8 Following Kent's participation in research for the Fostering Network in 2015 (motivation for fostering and the retention of foster carers), all new carers have an allocated mentor at Stage 2 of the recruitment process, who then remains with them throughout their first year. As part of this research, Kent introduced exit interviews and six month post approval interviews for new carers to learn from why carers are leaving the service and to ensure new carers are fully

supported in their first year and obtain feedback on their experiences of the recruitment process.

5. Where we are today

- 5.1 The key areas of focus going forward are improving placement stability as well as the retention of experienced Foster Carers. The Head of Fostering has recruited 30 foster carer ambassadors to support the work of the Service in developing policy and improving practice and support in order to retain current Foster Carers.
- 5.2 The “Sense of Belonging” project to improve placement stability was launched in March 2017. The provision will focus on children with three plus placement moves, on part-time timetables or excluded from education, at risk of Missing/CSE or with complex needs. This will comprise of three offers of support to our foster carers and children:
1. Use of the Council’s outdoor activity centres to provide residential weekends for children and young people to have new opportunities and make friendships, alongside giving Foster Carers planned breaks to improve the placement stability. The first cohort of 10 boys started attending the centres in January 2017 and they have evaluated their experiences and provided feedback directly to the Head of the Fostering Service. Both the Foster Carer and the children’s feedback have been extremely positive for this new and innovative service.
 2. The recruitment of five hub foster carer families across the county to work with three to four complex young people and their carers to provide emergency respite and day care at times of crisis in order to prevent placement disruption. This will be based on the Mockingbird Project (2016) and a pilot in East Kent in 2016, which linked the improvement in placement stability to having access to local emergency respite and day care support from the same identified carer.
 3. The replacement for the Therapeutic Reparenting Scheme (TRP), to provide clinical psychology support at times of crisis for children and their Foster Carers, supported by two KCC support workers to assist with direct intervention. The service is commissioned through the Anna Freud Centre and will be launched on 1 September 2017.
- 5.3 The Disabled Children’s Fostering Team is an area of excellence, with experienced fostering staff supporting Foster Carers to provide both full time care and Short Breaks for disabled children. The service is looking to expand to ensure all areas are well resourced for disabled children, particularly to enable Short Breaks to be provided by a family, as opposed to residential based care. The Disabled Children’s Fostering Team is currently working on how to improve children’s participation in the carer’s annual reviews and thinking creatively

about how to use technology such as iPads to engage children with communication difficulties.

- 5.4 The Kent Foster Carers Association (KFCA) works closely with the Head of Fostering to support Kent Foster Carers and provide additional support and learning, alongside promoting activities and appreciation events for Foster Carers and children. Regular meetings support this work and ensure a joint approach to planning events and consistency in all areas, evidenced by a joint conference in July 2017. A county appreciation award event for Foster Carers and staff has been arranged for 4 October 2017.
- 5.5 The Kent Fostering Service is an ambitious service, aiming to provide excellence within its placements. There is a clear vision and plan to work together with partnership agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Kent Fostering Service is assisted by multi agency partners in Virtual School Kent (VSK), Police, Health (including children and mental health services (CAMHS) and designated nurses as well as local community partnerships such as the Children's Centres and community groups who are able to assist in promoting fostering within the local community.
- 5.6 The business plan will be reviewed quarterly by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and the Head of Fostering and will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

6. Recommendation

<p>6.1 Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to DISCUSS and APPROVE the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2017-2018.</p>

7. Background Documents

Report on Independent Fostering Service Review September 2016

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s72243/B1%20-%20Fostering%20Service%20Independent%20Review%20-%20MASTER.pdf>

Fostering services: national minimum standards -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards>

The Mocking Bird Project - <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/projects-and-programmes/mockingbird-programme>

The evaluation of the Mockingbird Family Model -

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/560625/DFE-RR528-Mockingbird_family_model_evaluation.pdf

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