

From Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
 Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To Corporate Parenting Panel – 19 July 2018

Subject **The National Fostering Stocktake - Foster Care in England. A review for the Department for Education by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers – February 2018**

Classification Unrestricted

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| Summary | This report provides Members with an overview of the National Fostering Stocktake (2018). It includes the Kent Fostering Business Plan for 2018-2019, linked to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Agencies. (2011) |
| Recommendation | Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to NOTE the recommendations of the National Fostering Stocktake and the delivery of the Kent Fostering Business Plan. |

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Secretary of State for Education appointed Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers to conduct the National Fostering Stocktake for England during 2017. Their report, Foster Care in England, was published in February 2018. The independent review of foster care in England contains 36 recommendations to the government about how the outcomes of children in foster care can be improved, including:

- Ensuring foster carers are supported and included in decision-making;
- Improving foster placement commissioning, and matching;
- Greater stability and permanence for children and young people in foster care.

2.0 Summary of the data

2.1 As at March 2017, 53,420 children were in foster care from a care population of 72,670. In 2016-2017, £1.6 billion was spent on foster care and 62% of children in foster care were placed within the boundaries of their local authority.

2.2 During 2016-2017, the most common reason for placement change was a change to the care plan (35%) followed by foster carers requesting an end to the placement (12%).

2.3 Children in foster care do not do as well educationally when compared to the general population; however, they do better than children 'in need'.

- 2.4 Findings from a survey found that most children who responded felt 'being looked after' was a positive intervention; this had improved their lives and they felt safe in their placements.
- 2.5 As at 31 March 2016, there were 44,320 approved fostering households, 67% of these were registered with local authorities.
- 2.6 The average weekly spend on a placement is approximately £634 per child, per week (2016/2017) although spend ranges from around £350 to £900.
- 2.7 The average weekly cost of a local authority placement is £475 compared with £798 for independent fostering agency placement.

3.0 Helping carers to make fostering more effective

- 3.1 Foster carers must be treated professionally. The statutory guidance should be changed to ensure foster carers involvement in review meetings is the default position.
- 3.2 The Department for Education are to urgently remind all local authorities that the delegation of total authority for all category one decisions should apply automatically, unless, for exceptional reasons, such delegation is inappropriate.
- 3.3 The Department for Education are to clarify in future guidance the issue of physical affection.
- 3.4 Local authorities should be able to decide on an individual social worker who is best placed to offer support to a foster family in long-term placements.
- 3.5 Local authorities should be able to dispense with the role of Independent Review Officers (IRO) and reinvest savings in frontline staffing.
- 3.6 There needs to be an assessment and consultation with the sector and carers on the effectiveness, cost and value for money of fostering panels.
- 3.7 Local authorities need to ensure the department for education guidance on allegations is followed in all cases and carers need to be reassured that they will be supported through the process. All fostering services should consider introducing structured peer support for carers.

Link to the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2018-19

Kent Fostering have launched the foster carer satisfaction survey (June 2018) to establish whether our foster carers feel they are treated professionally and their view on the quality of the support provided.

The use of Delegated Authority will be reviewed to promote its use for children to be able to stay with foster carers extended family members through the use of relief care arrangements.

Kent Fostering has clear guidance on “Allegations and Complaints against Foster carers” and already have a Peer Support structure in place and a mentoring scheme. There is clear management oversight and tracking of allegations.

The Fostering Panel Chair Report (2018) evidences that Fostering panels in Kent function well and are compliant with the Fostering Regulations (2011).

4.0 The financial reward and compensation for foster carers

4.1 The stocktake endorses tiered approaches to paying fees, linked to the skills and experiences of carers. The payments to carers are not inadequate, nor an obstacle to recruitment and the government and local authorities should resist any move to award the foster carers employment status.

Link to the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2018-19

Kent Fostering already have a tiered system of payments, this is currently being reviewed and updated jointly with our Foster Carer Ambassadors and being linked to the Fostering Annual Review.

5.0 Recruitment

5.1 There is great merit in a national register of carers, the Department for Education is urged to evaluate the costs and advantages of this.

5.2 There should be greater regional cooperation on recruitment and as such, Local Authorities should consider combining recruitment efforts.

5.3 The Department for Education should consider rebranding and relaunching First4Adoption to improve foster care recruitment and this would need substantial funding from the Department for Education. The local authorities and independent fostering agencies might also be expected to contribute as it will help to reduce their own marketing spend.

5.4 All local authorities and independent fostering agencies are urged to review and improve the way they handle initial enquiries, with greater use of mystery shopping to monitor the quality of response.

5.5 The local authorities and independent review agencies should also invite a much larger proportion of resigning/retiring carers to take part in exit interviews.

5.6 The perception is that there is more poaching from independent fostering agencies to local authorities, where this happens independent fostering agencies should be compensated. It is suggested the transfer protocol, produced by the fostering network, is amended to reflect this.

Link to the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2018-19

The retention of foster carers is to be evaluated every 6-months using information from exit interviews. Post approval interviews are to be completed 6-months after approval to learn from the recruitment process and initial support.

Collaboration with other local authorities in relation to recruitment strategies and how foster ambassadors continue to support the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

6.0 Commissioning

- 6.1 Local authorities should share framework contracts, the secrecy and variation in prices only benefits providers. The local authorities should also come together to create approximately 10 commissioning consortia, the benefits of critical mass have the potential to reduce spend on fostering.
- 6.2 The consortia should appoint national account managers for larger independent fostering agencies to help reduce the likelihood of consortia competing against each other.
- 6.3 Larger local authorities or consortia should consider becoming self-sufficient in carer recruitment or partner with one or more independent fostering agencies to provide the complete fostering service.

Link to the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2018-2019

Total Placement Service 6 Month pilot from April 2018 will review commissioning of independent fostering placements and making best use of local provision. Kent already has a framework of providers and works closely with in house fostering provision to plan sufficiency of placements for Kent children and young people.

7.0 Matching

- 7.1 All local authorities should use Bright Spots, or similar, to regularly and systematically measure children's experiences of fostering relative to other local authorities.
- 7.2 The statutory guidance shows that children should know their rights to advocacy and how to access such services should be reinforced. The Department for Education should work with the Children's Commissioner and voluntary sector providers of advocacy services to ensure this is carried out. The local authorities should monitor the quality of referral information.
- 7.3 Carers should, wherever possible, be able to play a proactive role in matching. Adapting adopter-led family finding techniques to help find suitable long-term fostering placements should be piloted in several local authorities, and children must be routinely better prepared for a placement.

- 7.4 If the proposed register of carers were not to be introduced, at the very least a vacancy management should be established.

Link to the Kent Fostering Business Plan 2018-19

Kent are currently using MOMO to engage children's views and experiences in care.

Children are carefully matched to a foster placement and wherever possible given information about the foster carers before arrival. Every foster carer has an up to date profile with photographs that can be printed off and given to the children before the start of a placement.

Carers are given full information about the child and the fostering service and the foster carer contribute effectively to each child's placement plan review and statutory review of the child's care plan.

8.0 Matching and siblings

- 8.1 The department for education are urged to remind all local authorities of the change in the law about contact and the need for professionals to ensure that this only takes place where it is in the best interests of the child.
- 8.2 When moving placement, children should be routinely consulted about the adults and children who are important to them and, unless it is not in their interests, contact should be encouraged and facilitated.
- 8.3 Local authorities should review the environments in which family contact takes place and the way it is supervised and as part of the assessment process when sibling enter care, individually or simultaneously, local authorities should not presume that keeping groups together is in the interest of all children.
- 8.4 The individual needs of each child should be considered along with the ability of one set of carers to meet the developmental demands of the full sibling group.

9.0 A final word on permanence

- 9.1 Children on the edge of care and their families should receive earlier access to foster care. The department for education and a select number of local authorities should explore the potential of support foster care.
- 9.2 The priority must be to convert more fostering placements to arrangements that will last forever, either adoption of special guardianship, not least through longer term guarantees of financial support.
- 9.3 The work of the adoption leadership board and the residential care board should continue, and similar arrangements should be made to implement the recommendations of the fostering stocktake. Overseeing these boards, Ministers should establish a permanence board under the chairmanship of the Director General

for Children's Social Care, with the purpose of delivering permanence to more looked after children, and a sense of belonging.

10.0 The Children's Commissioners has gathered views and experiences of children in foster care to inform the national fostering stocktake

10.1 Children were asked a range of questions on being in care:

Q: What's the best thing about being in care?

Answer 1: Feeling like part of the family.

Some young people viewed their foster carers as 'their mum and dad', many enjoyed activities with their foster family, such as going on holiday and family days out.

Answer 2: A safe home.

Many children said the best thing about being in care was having access to a safe, permanent home.

Answer 3: Enhanced opportunities.

Some young people felt that they had been given better opportunities, extra support with schooling and preparation for life.

Q: What's the worst thing about being in care?

Answer 1: Lack of stability.

Uncertainty of placement stability and concerns expressed about how frequently their social workers and/or respite carers changed.

Answer 2: Uncertainty of leaving care.

Older children expressed anxiety about leaving care and they felt that not enough information was provided about what would happen after leaving care.

Answer 3: Lack of independence.

Some older children did not feel like they had a sense of independence and freedom.

Q: What do young people want from their foster carers?

Answer 1: To feel part of a family.

Answer 2: Increased financial support.

Answer 3: To be listened to.

10.2 Additional findings

- Stigma of being a child in care;
- Issues around 'staying put' policy;
- Lack of information prior to the placement;
- Poor matching with carers.

11.0 Conclusion

The Kent Fostering Service are confident that the 2018-19 Business Plan encompasses most of the recommendations from the **Foster Care in England** Report. There are some areas that will require further analysis and review for Kent County Council including the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer and the role of the Fostering Panels.

12.0 Recommendation

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **NOTE** the recommendations of the National Fostering Stocktake and the delivery of the Kent Fostering Business Plan.

13.0 Background Documents

none

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