

Policy and Scrutiny

**Open Report on behalf of Janice Spencer OBE,
Interim Director of Children's Services**

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	12 March 2020
Subject:	Fostering Report – Quarter 3

Summary:

The Annual Report for 2018/19 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Sub Group in September 2019. The statement of Purpose has been revised and was ratified on the same day. This is the third quarterly report for 2019/20.

Actions Required:

That the report be accepted as an accurate overview of the Fostering Service.

1. Introduction

In 2019/20, the Fostering service has an annual budget of £9,566,799. All Foster Carer allowances have been increased by 2% for this financial year. This has ensured that allowances continue to remain in advance of the government recommended minimum rates. This is important as the foster care market place is more complex with 5 independent agencies actively recruiting in the area, and in order to retain our competitiveness, allowances are a significant factor. The budget also continues to afford flexibility to provide enhanced allowances to certain categories of carers such as those offering permanence or managing particularly challenging children. In addition a retention initiative has been funded and will provide all mainstream foster carers with an additional annual payment based on experience, training and availability. The final tranche of payments will be made in the final quarter. There remains a national shortage of Foster Carers and the Fostering network claims that 13% of foster carers retire annually. The national shortfall has been assessed as 7600 foster carers.

Placements

At the end of quarter 3, the numbers of looked after children had remained steady at 632. At the same time those placed with Independent Fostering agencies has risen to 20, 3 of which are unaccompanied migrant children. Although the majority of those placed in the independent sector are young people in settled long term placements, 2 sibling groups of younger children have been placed this year.

61 children became looked after for the first time in this quarter, of these 40 were placed in foster care. In addition, 2 parent and child placements were made. There continues to be a high number of requests for respite predominantly to enable challenging placements to continue. Wherever possible, respite is provided within the foster carers own family network.

During the third quarter of this year, 14 children, including 4 sibling groups, were being considered at Family Finders. A sibling group of 2 was referred during this period. Of these 14 children, long term placements were identified for three children (each singleton) two of these were with their existing task centred carers. One child was removed from Family Finders following a move to a residential children's home. A potential match has also been identified for another child, with introductions currently taking place. Recruitment of permanent foster carers continues to be a challenge and most long term placements are as a result of established relationships with existing Foster carers. For children where no suitable family has been identified, plans continue to be referred to the monthly Family Finders Review meetings chaired by senior managers. This ensures that all possible options for family finding have been fully considered and explored.

Although the number of children on Family Finders for this quarter is lower than previous quarters, there are 29 children who are currently subject to care proceedings where the care plan is likely to be one of long term foster care. As a result the Permanence recruitment Campaign will continue and will be promoted within all Fostering Information Evening events throughout the year. A further "permanence" event will be held in the Summer of 2020.

Although no new foster carers have been approved for permanence at Fostering Panel during this quarter, two couples approved for respite and task centred foster care have expressed a firm interest in offering permanence. This serves to confirm that committing to take on a young person on a long term basis almost always evolves from an established relationship.

Staying Put

The number of Staying Put placements has fallen in the third quarter of 2019-2020 reporting period to 47 young people. Of this number, 37 are in full time further education with 5 attending university. The remainder are in Employment, on Work Experience Placements or Apprenticeships; with 2 of these on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme. There are a further 17 referrals for the period December 2019 – December 2020. The service is working with shared lives to ensure that young people with disabilities who are eligible for adult services are able to transition into the most suitable longer term accommodation provision.

Staying Put is discussed at the first review following the young person's 16th birthday with the decision being recorded on their pathway plan; which is then followed up at each review. Discussions around expectations and finances are undertaken with the young person and foster carers with a license agreement being completed prior to them turning 18. This ensures the transition to Staying Put is smooth with young people remaining informed about the process having support and stability to transition into adulthood.

Recruitment and Retention

A total of 55 Initial Expressions of Interest (IEI's) have been received during this quarter resulting in 43 initial visits being undertaken. The reasons 12 did not result in a visit include no spare bedroom, only wishing to foster children under 5 years of age but smoke, enquirers not fully understanding the fostering role and health issues is also a factor in enquiries not proceeding. We currently have 25 potential foster families at stage 1 of those, 12 have confirmed panel dates. The remaining 13 have recently attended the January Preparation to Foster Course or are booked onto a future course.

The 3 day Preparation to Foster Course is now delivered jointly with Caring2learn and incorporates many aspects of social pedagogy and restorative practice. The Recruitment and Retention Team has 2 FTE Social Worker posts 1 of which is a job share. Although the workers prioritise this activity, assessments are now picked up by the wider team to ensure that they are completed as a matter of priority. The assessment is a comprehensive piece of work as we know that unless applicants have fully considered all requirements of the role, the life-span as a foster carer is likely to be a short one.

Given the difficulty in recruiting, the service has 2 dedicated staff who respond rapidly to all enquiries. Whilst we are able to make direct contact with the majority of those, there is a cohort of enquirers who are more difficult to contact. To this end, we have agreed a process with our BS colleagues whereby evening calls between 16.00 and 19.30 hours will be made to those 'hard to contact' enquiries.

Retention

Retention is key to offering an effective fostering service. Experience cannot easily be replaced. Sadly the demographics of the fostering workforce is such that we are experiencing numerous health related and life change resignations. The next most cited reason for leaving is poor communication and lack of support. To that end, a presentation will be shared with all Social Care teams encouraging small changes in practice to ensure that foster carers are feeling valued and supported. The presentation will be delivered to all teams in this Quarter.

We have issued the "Support for our Foster Families document" which is an infographic and conveys the support provided by Lincolnshire Fostering Service to its foster families. The service has identified its unique selling point for Lincolnshire, especially with the implementation of Caring2Learn and the support which is offered as part of this package.

Marketing

During this quarter the service took part in the following events:

- Fostering Drop-in Session, 11am-2pm on Wednesday 2nd October at Costa in Lincoln
- Fostering Information Evening, 7-9pm on Wednesday 13th November in Lincoln
- Health and Social Care Information Event, 10am-2pm on Saturday 16th November at Social Care Exchange, Lincoln

- Fostering Information Evening, 7-9pm on Tuesday 19th November in Grantham

Across these events 10 IELs were completed in total.

Advertising which took place during this quarter included:

- Paid-for Facebook campaign ran from 22nd October - 13th November (for Lincoln event) and 28th October - 19th November (for Grantham event).
- Marketing e-newsletter promoting the events sent to subscribers on 23rd October.
- Half page advert in November edition of Lincolnshire Life Magazine.
- Digital news page takeover on Grantham Journal, Bourne Local and Stamford Mercury website from 28th October - 1st November.
- Advert in Lincolnshire Free Press on 29th October and 12th November advertising the Grantham event.
- Digital adverts on the Lincolnite (30th October - 13th November) and Lincolnshire Reporter (5th - 19th November) websites (including mobile).
- Advert in Spalding Guardian on 31st October and 14th November advertising the Grantham event.
- Advert in Grantham Journal on 1st and 15th November advertising the Grantham event.
- Advert in Bourne Local on 1st and 15th November advertising the Grantham event.
- Advert in Stamford Mercury on 1st and 15th November advertising the Grantham event.
- Internal communications went out on 5th November advertising both events.
- Fostering advert running on Lincs FM from 9th - 18th November.
- Half page advert and editorial in November edition of Lincs Scene.
- News page takeovers on Grantham Journal, Bourne Local and Stamford Mercury websites from 11th - 17th November.
- Twitter feeds advertising both events on LCC page from 11th - 19th November.

Recruitment & Retention Statistics

Recruitment has been challenging this year and is not assisted by the presence of independent providers in the market place. It is clear that some enquirers are comparing what different agencies have to offer prior to making an application. Sadly the trend of more mainstream carers retiring continues to exceed the number of those being recruited.

2 mainstream households have been approved in this quarter, providing up to 3 new places. A further 10 Kinship households and 2 Foster to Adopt households have been approved, making a total of 14 new households in the quarter.

(YTD approvals since April: 10 mainstream, 32 Kinship, 8 Foster to Adopt, total of 50 new households, plus an existing Kinship household approved for an additional placement)

10 mainstream households have been counted as de-registered in this quarter (up to 18 places), plus a further 12 Kinship households and 4 Foster to Adopt households, making a total of 26 de-registrations in the quarter.

(YTD de-registrations since April: 21 mainstream, 26 Kinship, 11 Foster to Adopt, total of 58 households)

Training

Face To Face Training

In this quarter there have been 21 Face to Face courses run which includes 8 facilitated by C2L.

Courses:

- Introducing Social Pedagogy
- Internet Safety
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Therapeutic parenting post placement
- Safeguarding
- Paediatric first aid
- Therapeutic parenting workshop transition
- Introduction to Restorative Practice
- Awareness of Child abuse and neglect foundation
- Mindfulness group facilitator
- Diversity
- Safecare
- Foetal alcohol (FASS)
- Challenging behaviour
- CSE and supporting sexually abused young people
- Understanding Self Harm
- FC Induction course
- Safer Caring Restorative practice
- Time2Talk
- Trauma Workshop
- Kidskills
- Secondary Trauma and Safe Care
- Introduction to Trauma Awareness
- Practice Day
- Solihull for Foster Carers

Parent and Child training is currently under review and work is on-going to ensure that these placements are more effectively managed as assessment places.

E-Learning

In this quarter 31 carers accessed e-learning courses

The Training Programme has been reviewed by Lisa Taylor, Jenny Allen and Rebecca Fleming and there is now one programme which has incorporated

caring2learn available to Foster Carers and Staff. The training programme has been distributed to carers

The Foster Carer induction course was reviewed to fully incorporate C2L and ensure that it links to revised TSD/Workbook. The first course was held on the 12th September 2019 which was attended by three C2L Champions. There has been a further Induction course held on the 6th December 2019, a review has been arranged for the 1st Feb 2020 as there are still areas that need to be developed.

Kinship

Quarterly Report 1st October to 31st December 2019

Number of Referrals	SGO	Private Law SGO	Reg.24 to SGO	Reg. 24 / Connected Person	Private Fostering
44	15	4	8	10	7

Kinship Team

The Third quarter of the 2019-2020 year continues to see the volume of referrals being in line with activity for the same period last year. There have been changes in terms of workers covering the kinship agenda as one of Practice Supervisors retired in November 2019 and to ensure consistency one of the Advanced Practitioner's from the service is now acting up to Practice Supervisor role and undertaking some of the PS responsibilities.

Of the 15 x SGO assessments as follows:

10 x are on-going
5 x applicants withdrew

Of the 4 x Private Law SGO

4 x Private Law SGO applications with area SW completing Schedule 21 Report and statutory checks completed by fostering service as these are private applications with 4 on-going and remain in Court Proceedings and waiting Final Hearing for decision to be made.

Of the 8 Reg.24 / SGO placements

8 are on-going Reg.24 placements with an SGO also directed within proceedings

Of the 10 Reg.24 assessments in this quarter:

10 are on-going

Of the 7 Private Fostering Arrangements as follows:

4 x completed and on-going

3 x arrangements ended

The Nuffield Foundation research in 2019 concluded that special guardianship continues to be an important permanence option 'for the right child and the right family'. But for this to be so, the system as a whole must operate in a coherent, timely, evidence-informed way and this requires changes in mind-set, regulations and protocols. The issues identified in are a combination of systemic, policy and practice issues.

Caring 2 learn

The established priorities for the fostering service are:

(1) Developing a community based support network for foster and residential carers.

A community Hub approach is being developed across the County. This includes the introduction and development of multiple forums and ways for Foster Carers to access support from other Foster Carers, Children's Service Teams and School staff, providing a more integrated approach to support. The forums have been developed according to the feedback from Foster Carers. We aim to build a single community hub for all Lincolnshire Foster carers. The Hub consists of various access points throughout the county to resolve the geographical issues faced by carers and build a strong sense of community with a consistent offer.

A detailed, graduated implementation is being used across the county, gradually introducing the platforms in each locality according to need and feedback. Children Services teams are starting to consider where in the model they fit and what support they offer to the fostering community looks like. Participation in the different areas of the hub continues to increase; all platforms of the hub intend to be in place by July 2020. There will be a requirement to monitor need to ensure support remains in the right location and delivers the right kind of support.

The community hub model opens the gateway to Foster Carers to be included in service forums and developing and connect with staff. Foster Carers feedback that this has helped them feel like a valued member of the whole team.

(2) Creating and recruiting to the role of Caring2Learn Champion, a group made up of Foster Carers, Residential Support Workers, Designated Teachers and Children's staff. They will provide peer support and challenge to advocate and support good practice by bringing all services and professionals together to promote how best to support each other and our children.

The Foster Carers Champion role has been divided into 3 main areas; Training and development, Education and Learning and Foster Carer community support. The priority for all the Foster Carer Champions remains Foster Carer community engagement and development which will be important for long term progress. All Champions have clear performance targets around their service area and this has certainly increased productivity. Each Foster Carer Education Champion has a clear development plan which they have developed and with support will review.

There are 20 Foster Carers with a champion role. There are also identified champions within the Fostering and Early Help Teams who are supporting the project and integration within their own services. There are plans to develop these roles within other children services areas and recruit 4 more Foster Carers in the South of the county to support the development and demands within the Hub model.

The Social Pedagogy Champion group has developed with Caring2Learn to be a workshop around all practice, broadening its focus and inviting representatives from other service areas, schools and Foster Carers. The last workshop welcomed 51 participants. The workshops are themed and consider how theory is transferred to practice. This forum also gives those attending to opportunity to share practice and resources.

(3) The development of Learning Homes and Caring Schools, which will assess, celebrate and drive good practice for Lincolnshire Looked after children.

The toolkit for new carers has been completed; this has merged the standards from the Training Standards development (TSD) that is usually completed meaning all carers will only complete one portfolio and will be awarded as Learning Homes with an expectation to resubmit a portfolio every 3 years to ensure on going personal and professional development.

We currently have 27 Foster homes and 3 residential settings that have achieved their Learning Homes Award. Due to the number of toolkits collected over recent months and the expectations that all new carers complete the award within 12 months of approval, we expect the number of awarded homes to rise significantly over the next 12-24 months. The Learning Homes Award has been achieved by 3 residential homes. The launch of the toolkits to others settings will take place in 2020.

School participation since the conference has risen to 170 providers. 39 Schools have already been awarded Caring School Awards.

Caring2learn in November won a Children and Young Person Now award for outstanding contributions towards outcomes for looked after children.

2. Conclusion

Despite the recruitment and retention challenges, the fostering service continues to meet the majority of the placement needs of children who become looked after. However there are a small group of children who struggle to manage in foster placements and experience too many placement moves. Recruitment activity remains creative and comprehensive but initial interest is not converting to applications and this has resulted in a significant reduction in the forecasted new carers this year.

The Caring2Learn approach has energised foster carers and provided training that has enhanced their skills. The service has mapped this in the West Lindsey areas and based on the experience will extend the approach to 2 other areas of the County within the next quarter.

3. Consultation

a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

N/A

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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