

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

Families and Children's Service Scrutiny Committee
16th November 2017

Fostering Agency Annual Report

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services: Andy Johnson

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

Purpose of Report

This report is the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2016/17. In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Fostering Services have to provide a report on the outcomes of the service.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Members note and scrutinize adoption performance.
2. The members acknowledge the report and performance information in regard to the period April 2016 – March 2017.

Key issues

1. The agency has identified a number of aims and objectives for 2017 - 18 to be endorsed by the Board.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the new corporate plan.

Northumberland County Council
Family Placement Service
Annual Report of the Fostering Agency
1st April 2016 – 31st March 2017

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the main developments relating to the Fostering Service during the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017.

2. Annual Dataset

The fostering activity for 2016/17 is collated via an annual dataset. The dataset is submitted by all Fostering Services to Ofsted. The data is then collated to give a national picture of fostering in both local authorities and independent fostering agencies.

3. Ofsted Inspection

The Ofsted Single Inspection Framework for 'the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' incorporates fostering services into the single framework inspection process. Northumberland was inspected under this framework in January/February 2016. The outcome from this inspection is that Children's Service's within Northumberland requires improvement to be good.

The full inspection report can be accessed at https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/northumberland/052_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children's%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf

4. Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel has a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of placements of children in foster care. The panel meets at least once a month and has an independent chairperson who has significant knowledge and experience of fostering issues. The panel advisor, panel chair and panel members all play a key role in the quality assurance of all documents that are presented to panel.

The fostering panel approved 15 mainstream foster carers and 22 family and friend foster carers. The Fostering Panel also considers all deregistration of foster carers for monitoring purposes and foster carer annual reviews.

The Fostering Panel also considers whether the plan for a child should be long term fostering and the decision in regard to matching children to a foster carer long term. In 2016/17, 6 children had the plan for long term fostering recommended and the decision ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

As at 31st March 2017, 29 children are in long term foster placements with Northumberland foster carers with a further 48 children living with family and friends foster carers.

5. Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is a Children’s Senior Manager. The ADM is provided with all fostering panel papers and the copy of the final minutes in line with the regulations. The ADM provides any feedback to panels via the panel advisor

No cases have been referred to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) during this timeframe.

6. Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers

The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a priority. The Fostering Recruitment Campaign has continued throughout 2016/17. Information Evenings continue to be bi-monthly. Young People from the Voices Making Choices (VMC) Group are part of these sessions.

The Family Placement Service has a Recruitment and Marketing Strategy. The aim of this strategy is to recruit carers living in and within reasonable travelling distance of Northumberland who have the skills and qualities to meet the diverse needs of both children and young people in our care.

The strategies for fostering recruitment are based on an analysis of practice information including current and emerging areas of need in terms of our children & young people.

Recruiting foster carers is an on-going, year round campaign, with focus at particular time periods e.g. Foster Care Fortnight. These opportunities provide extra support from the press and social media elements of the campaign.

All NCC foster carers have an annual membership with Foster Talk funded by the service. Foster Talk is an independent, non-profit organisation providing professional support services to foster carers across the UK.

7. Data

The Fostering Dataset attached provides greater detail in regard to the yearly activity within the Fostering Service.

The following information gives some comparisons of data for the last 3 years:

As at 31 st March for each year	Total Number of LAC population	Number of children placed with NCC mainstream foster carers	Number of children placed with NCC family & friends carers	Total number of children with NCC registered foster carers
2014/15	365	109	41	150
2015/16	389	125	37	162
2016/17	407	155	44	199

As at 31 st March for each year	Total Number of NCC approved mainstream foster carers	Number of approved NCC family & friends carers	Total Number of NCC registered foster carers
2014/15	85	31	116
2015/16	94	28	122
2016/17	128	42	170

50 children are also placed with family and friends under a Regulation 24 arrangement. This is a temporary emergency arrangement where the carers are not already approved as foster carers but are known to the child. This is referred to as a connected person who is defined as an individual who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child. The 2010 Regulations specify the assessment requirements before the child may be placed under these temporary approval arrangements.

A number of young people have remained living with their foster carers in a Staying Put arrangement. As at the end of March 2017, 5 young people aged 18 years or over, continued living with their NCC foster carer.

8. Foster Carer Support

Foster carers are provided with a high level of support from their allocated supervising social worker. A comprehensive training programme is in place with core training being essential for all foster carers to attend and more specialist courses are also on offer.

The fostering team have been trained to deliver the 'Fostering Changes' course. This enables the staff to apply the principles of this course when supporting and advising foster carers on a range of behaviour management techniques. The course has been delivered twice over this 12 month period (this is a 12 week course) and 2 refresher courses have also taken place. This course is mandatory for all foster carers therefore will continue to be delivered on a year by year basis.

All foster carers are reviewed annually in line with the regulations, with early reviews taking place if necessary. All first annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel. At this meeting foster carers are able to give feedback both verbally and in writing in regard to the support they have received. Feedback is also collated once a placement ends from a cross section of people, for example, the foster carer, the child, the social worker.

The service has developed to specific schemes to meet the demand for placements, these being 24/7 emergency placement and parent and child placements. Specific training has been tailored around these schemes.

The Foster Carer Consultation Group has been established and has met quarterly. This group has an agreed terms of reference and a cohort of 12 foster carers who met with the managers from the service to discuss key development issues.

Various events have taken place for looked after children, children of foster carers and foster carers over the year that has included a ceilidh, trip to Whitehouse Farm, pantomime trip, trip to Flamingo Land.

The children of foster carer group has met 3 times to participate in a number of activities. This is a new group that is to be developed further in 2017/18 in regard to being a support group for the children and to also be accessed for consultation on specific issues in relation to being part of a foster carer family.

9. Reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's)

The Local Authority has continued to reduce its reliance on the number of children being placed in IFA placements. IFA's placements are only been resourced if the needs of the child can not be met by an in house placement, for example, large sibling groups being accommodated, assessed needs of the child.

IFA placements place a significant financial pressure on the Local Authority. Different monitoring and approval systems have been implemented in regard to tracking these placements. A weekly High Level Resource Panel was implemented in January 2017 with this being chaired by the Children's Service Director. A review of these meetings will take place in 2017/18.

The number of children placed in IFA's as at the financial year end are:

As at 31st March for each year	Total number of children in IFA placements
2014/15	95
2015/16	86
2016/17	60

As at the 31st March 2017, 34 children have had their placement in an IFA agreed as long term.

10. Outcomes for Looked After Children

The success of looked after children is hugely dependant on the high quality care each child receives. Foster carers are encouraged to ensure they provide children and young people with the opportunity to reach their full potential in all areas of development for example, formal educational environment, recreational activities. The training that is in place for foster carer's supports, equips and enhances the necessary skills to do this, for example, Making Sense of Education Services, Reading with Children & Young People.

Support is provided for looked after children from a whole range of services including the Education Support for Looked After Children's Team (ESLAC), Community Support Teams, dedicated health team for looked after children.

Children and young people in foster carer are encouraged to participate with the children in care council – Voices Making Choices.

11. Aims & Objectives 2017/18

The service will continue to successfully operate on a day to day basis in line with the Fostering National Minimum Standards & Regulations and other key legislation.

Seven of the key aims and objectives for 2017/18 are:

- Continue to increase placement availability and choice ensuring the service remains inclusive and engaging to all, while maintaining a focus on a number of key targeted audiences, for example, sibling groups, older children, long term placements
- Undertake an initial review of the core offer available to foster carers
- Review the payment structure to foster carers
- Review the number of fostering panels taking place
- Develop the Foster Carer Consultation Group
- Further develop the children of foster carers support group
- Improve the number of children being presented to the fostering panel for long term fostering.

BACKGROUND

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	Northumberland Fostering and Adoption Services Manual Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose Corporate Parenting Strategy Other relevant legislation as detailed below.
Finance and value for money:	The Family Placement Service has a budget that is closely monitored to ensure value for money in regard to the placements and provision it provides.
Legal:	Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011 (England) Children Act 1989 and 2004 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (England) The above mentioned policies, procedures and guidance.
Procurement:	None
Human Resources:	None
Property:	None
Equalities: (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment:	This report is part of the Risk Management systems in place to check on the standards and service provision of children in foster placements.
Crime & Disorder:	NONE
Customer Considerations:	
Carbon Reduction:	NONE
Wards:	NONE

CONSULTATION

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Report sign off.

Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Director of Children's Services	Andy Johnson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Wayne Daley

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Useful Links

- NCC Fostering Service webpage
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Looked-after/Fostering.aspx>
- Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations
www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards
- NCC Virtual School for Looked After Children webpage
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=12414>
- Staying Put Guidance
www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above
- Foster Talk website
<https://www.fostertalk.org>