

FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT

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Report Owner –Carol Moreton (Registered Person) Fostering Team Manager

Alison Forshaw – Kinship and SGO Team manager

Jo King (Responsible Person) – Head of Looked After Children

Introduction

This report complies with Standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards which sets out the condition that the Fostering Service Manager will monitor and report to board members and management members about the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every three months.

Establishment

See Appendix 1.

In the last 12 months the Fostering Team has separated into two distinct service areas to meet the increased need for specialised services and increase sufficiency: the General Fostering Team managed by Carol Moreton and the Kinship and SGO Hub managed by Alison Forshaw.

The 'general' Fostering team is responsible for short, long and respite placements for children and young people 0-18 yrs, Supported Lodgings Providers and HIPSS foster carers (Herefordshire Intensive Support Services).

Michelle Baxter was appointed as Senior Practitioner in November 2014 but has been unable to fully assume this role due to holding a full caseload and difficulties in recruiting to the fostering team in Dec/Jan 14/15. This post was filled and taken up in March 2015 and a handover of casework has now been achieved. Michelle Baxter will assume core responsibility for the operational aspects of the Fostering team ie Duty , initial enquiries and some staff supervision and complex casework. Carol Moreton will be able to fulfil Statutory and developmental service delivery ie Sufficiency and Recruitment, SLP and HIPSS development in addition to staff supervision and liaison with internal and external Agencies.

A further social work vacancy is now filled – due to start end of April. Both appointments were to social workers from other stretched teams and this has placed stress elsewhere in ‘the service’. An agency social worker was appointed for 6 months to bridge the gap from appointment to start dates as there are currently 2 fostering social work vacancies with a rolling internal and external advert given the previous lack of suitable candidates. At the time of writing there are now sufficient applications to progress shortlisting and interview.

Victoria Leader was appointed as the HIPSS Project co-ordinator in January 2015. Refer to detail regarding HIPSS development below.

Alison Forshaw was appointed as Kinship and SGO team manager in July 2014, following the brief appointment and departure of Kevin Hawkins an Agency manager. This is a full time permanent post. In the last 6 months the Kinship hub has assumed case work responsibility from the general fostering team for all kinship carers, becoming fully staffed for a short period in February/March 2014. Unfortunately one full time member of staff is currently serving notice due to a desire to relocate geographically and recruitment is needed to ensure the kinship team is again fully staffed.

Fostering social workers continue to hold a case load of between 18-22 cases. Issues relating to the geographic spread have been compensated by reallocation of cases over the last year into area groupings to reduce time spent by fostering social workers travelling. However, this continues to be a particular challenge for kinship workers for whom viability visits or carers are spread from Hull to Devon.

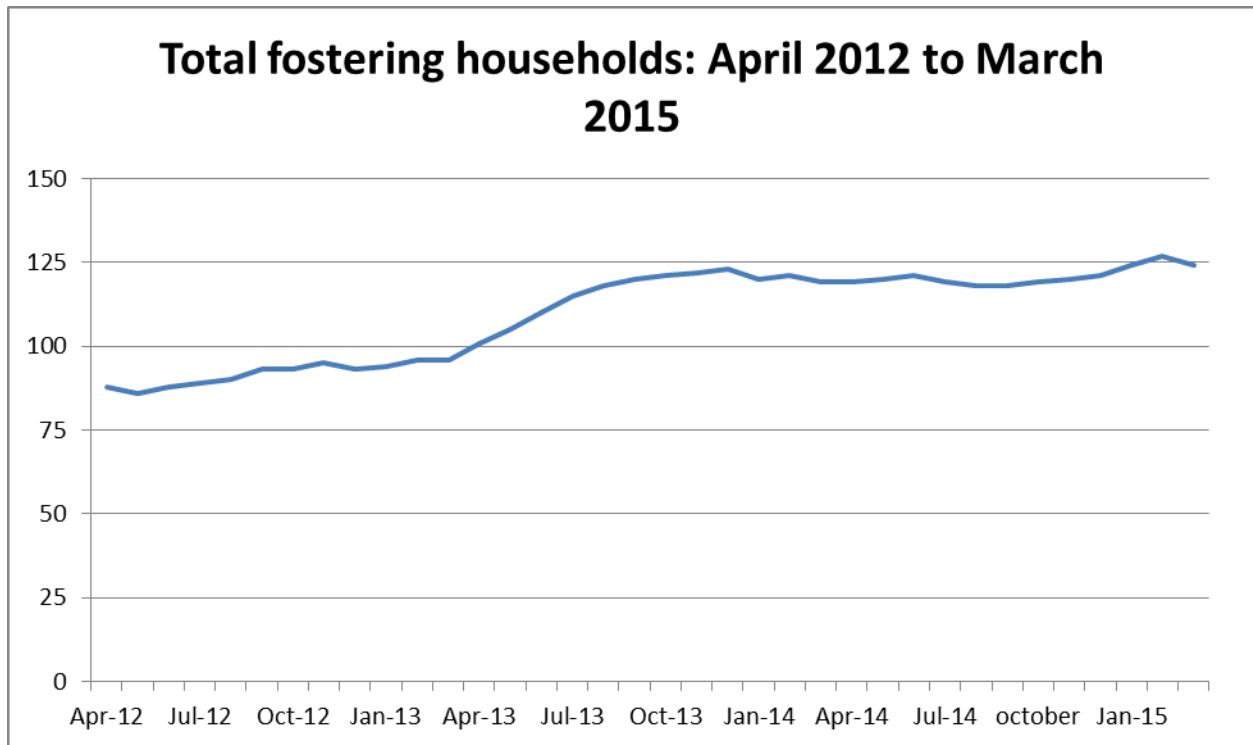
Current Picture:

Herefordshire ‘In- house’ fostering service was judged by Ofsted in 2013 as achieving good outcomes for children and rated adequate overall. As part of the Inspection in May 2014 there was no stand alone judgement but assessment from Inspectors was that the fostering team was providing a good service to Looked After Children.

We support, supervise and provide training for 92 general fostering households, 21 Supported lodgings providers and 32 kinship foster carers. Over the year this is an increase of 11 general fostering households, and 7 SLP providers on last April's figures with Kinship remaining broadly the same:

Resignations in the year – 9 general foster carers (8 in the previous year). This reflects carers retiring, relocating geographically, placement disruption or changing approval ie from fostering to SLP in one case, from fostering to HIPSS in another. The latter means 2 of the 9 resources have not been lost but have changed role.

There are 124 Fostering households at end of March 2015.



KINSHIP AND SGO:

The original SGO (Special Guardianship Order) social worker is currently off due to long term ill-health. There has been significant work done to identify Herefordshire's Special Guardians and we now know that there are 97 Special Guardians. The Team Manager is aware that identifying numbers is a difficulty for many local authorities (as discussed at the Midlands SGO Group forum). A review of financial support plans has been completed and a decision on whether any adjustments should be made is being explored as part of the care placement strategy, Legal Advice has been sought. The process of review for Special Guardians is now in place and financial support is outlined clearly prior to an Order being made and so that applicants can seek independent advice on this.

This has been a period of induction of new staff with 4 new members joining the team. All are now fully integrated in the team, mandatory training is completed, and they are now familiar with processes and procedures. In terms of whole service support new social workers are now able to support Duty responsibilities for the service and have a clear understanding of expectations around facilitating training.

The team now have a Kinship Family Support Worker (KFSW) who has already provided intensive support to 9 families whilst continuing to support a sibling group of children within the CWD team. Key focus is on supporting emergency placement of children, this is where friend or family members care for a child with little or no notice and are often dealing with their own emotional responses to a family

crisis. Whilst a fostering assessment is underway the KFSW can help families make adjustments. One of the 9 are Special Guardians and support successfully resolved contact issues for the child with the birth parent. The Special Guardians were happy that the contact arrangements were child led.

The KFSW is also setting up a birth children support group for children of kinship carers and will co-facilitate Solihull training and has undergone initial Solihull training and has attended the 12 week course. Further funding will be needed to enable her to complete the Facilitators course.

The Kinship and SGO Hub currently supervises, supports, monitors and trains 30 fully approved kinship fostering households. In March there are 6 full assessment ongoing (plus two SGO assessments) and on average the team are completing 3 viability assessment visits per week alongside childcare team colleagues. Four of these assessments will be presented to panel in April with the remaining in May.

The Kinship and SGO Hub now hold weekly 1 hour peer group supervisions that are open generally to others who may have an interest in fostering issues or are involved jointly in cases. Alongside case discussions, topics covered have been - anti-discriminatory practice and acknowledging own value base, two stage assessment process, How do we encourage... eg. foster carers, each other, communication, reviewing family support. As a team there is an open door policy to social work students who may wish to join these peer group supervisions.

The Kinship and SGO Hub are preparing to take over the monitoring of Private Fostering Arrangements and as a follow on from the recent radio advertisement is developing information materials and looking at how to build awareness amongst ethnic minority communities.

The team celebrate compliments and have recently received three. Unannounced visits are in line with Service policy, as are reviews of approvals; 98% of Kinship foster have now reached Level 1 status and 1 carer has achieved Level 2.

A final stage of assessment auditing tool has been introduced across the service.

SLP AND Staying Put:

The position of our Supported Lodgings Provision has strengthened in terms of recruitment and support. One social worker post is now dedicated to SLP support. Of the 19 SLP providers 6 combine fostering and SLP support. There are 21 young people currently in SLP placements (March 31st). Whilst there is no Statutory duty we have brought SLP providers in line with fostering levels of Formal Supervision Visits, unannounced visits and provided specific 3day training on Teenage Attachment, Risk Taking and Independence skills this quarter to increase the monitoring, support and skill set of all Providers to achieve best practice.

HIPSS (Herefordshire Intensive Placement support Scheme):

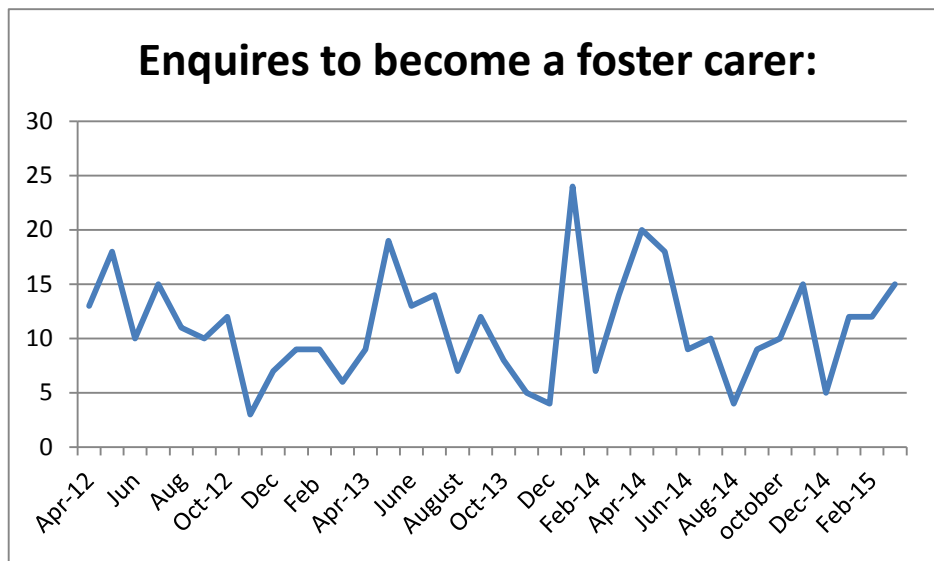
As above Vicky Leader has been in post since January 2015 in conjunction with the establishment of the HIPSS team at no 3, Blackfriars St. Pending full HIPSS placement activity the team has been providing TISS consultations to a number of foster carers in the last couple of months and qualitative feedback from carers has been that this has been helpful in supporting placements and preventing placement breakdown – further analysis of this work will be provided by the HIPSS service later in the year.

We have one HIPSS foster carer approved, she has transferred from in-house fostering to the HIPSS scheme with introductions to a first placement underway. A second carer (again transferring from in-house SLP) is booked in to April Panel. One HIPSS kinship placement is also being supported. A further assessment is also underway with a new provider. This means the HIPSS development is on target within the current Care Placement Strategy (CHIPP PROJECT 18, Developing a Fresh Approach to LAC).

Recruitment:

Over the last 12 months some sessional hours were allocated to increased publicity in local supermarkets and high town events and reflected a rise in interest in fostering enquiries – see graph below March – June 2014. In the last quarter a radio campaign and Hereford Times advertising for older teen carers and HIPSS carers has been underway which is beginning to show an upward trend in interest(DEC 14 – March 14).

Analysis of the three year period shows significant peaks and troughs around the Christmas and summer periods as might be expected.



More detailed analysis of the last quarter indicates that an equal proportion of enquiries came from radio or website information and word of mouth from other carers. Of 34 initial enquiries these made 50 % of enquiries. The Council Website clearly has the greater impact (in line with other local Authority’s data and research produced by digital companies – for example Net Natives- Google - which also shows an increase in mobile device searches which reflect in a 7% increase in fostering and adoption ‘searches’.) Local press did not appear to have generated specific interest – but refer to the HIPSS open evening below. This may equally be due to gaps in taking information at the point of enquiry recorded as ‘other’. A more strategic approach is needed focused on social media, specific promotional events and monitoring of data within our recruitment strategy for 2015 – 16.

Accordingly, a Marketing Officer post has been advertised and a Recruitment support worker is in Job Evaluation to ensure consistent response times and to reduce 'drop off' in interest until Skills to Foster Preparation training is delivered to potential applicants. This is interlinked with the Fostering Team plan to increase the number of fostering preparation training courses planned for the next 2 year period to enable us to progress enquiry to training and assessment in a more coherent and timely manner.

Specific recruitment is needed within the Polish community, and to increase sufficiency for older children, long term, sibling placements and HIPSS foster carers.

Panel:

All Foster Carers Annual Reviews have taken place within timescales in the last 12 months. Statutory guidance is that all foster carers must attend panel within 12 months of being approved – this has been achieved. We also bring all other annual reviews to return to Panel following a significant change in circumstance ie bereavement, ill health, retirement or serious concern requiring a review of approval conditions, this has also been achieved. However, as the service and numbers of carers expand it is becoming increasingly difficult to bring foster carers for independent overview to a formal Foster Panel every 3 years as a matter of good practice. New applications alone have accounted for two panels being convened in November 2014 and January 2015.

Whilst many agencies do not bring all reviews routinely to Panel we aspire to improve and this is an area of future development within the team plan and CHIPP programme to have 2 panels per month by October 2015.

In order to meet regulatory requirements NMS 15 and 30 the Fostering service has brought the Fostering Panel Co-ordinator role in from Business support to ensure efficiency and quality of statutory checks and references and administration.

Unannounced Visits:

Of 124 carer households two unannounced visits have fallen out of timescale (1.6%); one due to change of FSW allocated/bereavement, one due to reassessment and serious concern procedures : thus, **98.4 % have one U/A (as per Requirement) and 63% 2 visits – as set within the Fostering Service to achieve 'Ofsted Good'**).

Some adjustment is made for those approved in the last 6 months who are on track to have 2 within the year. The number of single U/A's is in part due to kinship carers in different parts of the country (ie Devon or Hull) where geographically 2 unannounced visits are impracticable.

Although not regulated we have also introduced unannounced visits and Formal supervision Visits to Supported Lodgings Providers to improve and maintain quality of care.

Serious matters for concern – LADO

Notifiable events – 56 incidents reported within the year: this reflects absconding, accident and mental health episodes at normal levels but does particularly reflect an increase in hospital admissions due to 5 very young children with complex needs being Looked After Children requiring either operations or frequent admissions for infections/illness this year.

In the last year there have been 9 Referrals made to LADO, 3 were to seek the opinion of the LADO manager and were felt not to meet the threshold following further investigation. Of four LADO meetings held the outcomes for 2 LADO referrals were unfounded, one substantiated and one was felt to be malicious. All four returned to Fostering panel for Fostering Review of carer's approval status.

Two referrals are still under Joint investigation by police and social care. Both of these are complex and one of these in particular is of a very serious nature.

Training and Support to Foster Carers:

The last year has seen an increased focus on support to carers through training and increasing skills. Within General fostering households we have 10 Level 3 carers, 6 with additional transfer or complex needs payments, 63 level 2 and 13 level 1 foster carers (total 92 households).

There are 4 level 3 SLP carers.

The Family Support worker has received referrals and worked intensively to support 65 carers, birth children or LAC children to prevent placement breakdown and, or, 'upskill' carers to meet the needs of challenging placements. Refer to appendix 2.

A new Training Program for April 2015 – March 2016 has been developed for Foster carers and SLP providers – this has an increased number of workshops with valuable input from other Partners – namely the LAC team, Adoption, HSCB, and YOT Services. Training for older teens and independence skills has been worked into the programme to increase sufficiency and meet any service gaps.

Foster Carer Representatives continue to provide invaluable links with carers – now providing a 'buddying scheme' to newly approved carers, a regular quarterly newsletter and advice and support. Based on the success of this role and partnership work with the service the foster carer representatives for general fostering will be joined by Kinship representatives from April 2015. The representatives have begun to represent the views of foster carers at Corporate parenting Panel and LACPOG.

The Practice issues group for carers has continued to meet every two months as has the weekly 'Stay and Play' which could now be referred to as sufficiently embedded in the Service to be 'business as usual'.

Finance and Budgetary issues:

The fostering service over spent on fostering allowances in 2014/15 as a result of the previous baseline budget not being adjusted to allow for the increase in fostering households and the increase in the number of level 2 and level 3 carers. The budget has been adjusted this year to allow for increase of in house fostering capacity in line with the care placement strategy. The 1% increase was not paid in 2014/15 so in 2015/16 a back dated payment to April 2014 will need to be paid to allow for the 1% increase last year and a further 1% increase will need to be paid to bring us in line with statutory level of payment.

The finance team is completing deep dive work on the way fostering payments are made and the aim in 2015/16 will be for in house payments to be made via FWI rather than the current system.

Staying Put:

The costs for 2014/15 of Staying Put arrangements are included within the budget, at £70k. For 2015-16 the full year cost of those currently in Staying Put arrangements plus the additional arrangements required will be £142k. Those residing in a Staying Put arrangement qualify for housing benefit reducing the staying put cost by £37k to £105k.

Staying Put Costs	2014-15		2015-16	
	Numbers	£000's	Numbers	£000's
Current Arrangements:				
Internal	5	47	5	71
External	1	23	1	38
Total Current	6	70	6	109
Additional for 15-16			2	33
Total payments			8	142
Housing Benefit Contribution				37
Total for 2015-16			8	105

There are 8 Staying Put arrangements currently in place for 2015/16. This is subject to change. The cohort of 16+ in foster placements is monitored to identify future requests for Staying Put arrangements and the associated costs.

For those young people who are in employment and remaining with carers a £50.00 a week contribution will be made towards the placement.

HIPSS:

(Please see performance review report)

Training Budget for carers:

£7,000 has been allocated to the foster carers training program and spend has been reduced by sourcing some training internally from across the service and via partners.

Marketing budget:

£72,423 has been allocated to cover the marketing post, the recruitment support post and marketing materials in 2015/16. £3,000 was already built into the recruitment budget for promotional materials.

PLANNING AHEAD – TEAM PLAN 2015**Recruitment and Assessment targets**

Additional investment and staff mean that each fostering social workers' case load will reduce from @ 18-22 to @ 16-18 carer households as duty tasks are reduced and initial enquiries will be undertaken by the Recruitment Support worker (currently being completed by a temporary agency worker). As such, fostering social workers have capacity to increase the number of fostering assessments per annum- from 4 per annum FTE to 6 assessments. This is dovetailed with a planned change to moving to the BAAF 2 stage assessment processes and an expectation that assessment by the social worker will be completed in 4 months from progression to stage 2 and approval at Fostering Panel.

We need to recruit an additional 41 carer households (including 10 HIPSS carers) over the next 12 months to also take into account projected retirement or resignations of carers. All social workers will be expected to carry 2 assessments as well as carry out support roles.

(Annual figures for 2014 was a net figure of 11 households after retirement and withdrawals).

Permanence:

There are currently 15 single or sibling placements requiring long term or permanent placements. Specific recruitment needs to be part of the 2015 recruitment strategy for 'hard to place or challenging' placements. The CHIPP Permanence Workstream is aimed at earlier planning processes to consolidate planning and prevent drift and will be in place by September 2015.

Fwi /Audit tools

The Lac Workflow is ongoing and Fostering also need this in place to supplement current tasks, incorporate SLP work and develop improved audit tools which are currently manual. Updating existing templates and developing Chronologies for foster carers to be in place in readiness for FWi workflow activity is planned for 2015.

Signed: 

Carol Moreton, Fostering Team Manager

Dated: 30/4/15

Appendix 1

Team Structure chart.

Appendix 2

Family Support Worker Intervention – retention or carers and preventing Disruption.