

Date	7 April 2014	Agenda Item	8
-------------	--------------	--------------------	----------

Milton Keynes Fostering Services Regulation 35 Report - 1 October 2013 – 31 December 2013

Author: Jane Partridge
Title: Team Manager
Service Group: Children and Families-Integrated Support and Social Care

Report Summary

Purpose:

This report details the activity of the fostering service during the quarter 1 October 2013 to 31 December 2013. It provides a brief summary of the work delivered and undertaken by the service and the fostering panel.

Background:

This is a report required under The Fostering Service (England) Regulations, Part 6 Review of Care Regulation 35. The registered person is required to provide a 3 monthly report to the Local Authority's executive.

Corporate Priorities:

Improving the quality of the Fostering Service and the related fostering panel contributes to good outcomes for Milton Keynes' Looked After Children. This is in line with the council's Children & Families - Priority 4: To develop and maintain effective intervention that prevent the most vulnerable children and young people in our communities from experiencing additional difficulty and prevents them from suffering significant harm.

Equality and Diversity Impact:

The fostering service is provided for children from across the Milton Keynes' community. It therefore needs to provide foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children and young people in the Council's care.

Performance Information:

Performance information relating to key areas of service activity is contained within the body of the report and summarised below:

Summary

- **2** new child care professionals have become panel members
- During this period, **5** mainstream carers and **5** Family and Friends carers have been approved
- **36** assessments are in progress, including mainstream foster care, family and friends supported lodgings and special guardianships
- Approved number of mainstream foster carers, family and friends carers (+Regulation 24) and supported lodgings households = **169**
- On average **73%** of Milton Keynes children in foster care are placed Milton Keynes Council foster carers and **63%** of placement requests in this quarter were met within this service.
- **10** children gained permanence: **For detail see confidential annex.**
- The work presented to panel was maintained to a high standard.
- **For detail see confidential annex:** allegations were made against foster carers and investigated under safeguarding procedures. Ofsted were notified in line with Schedule 7.
- The recruitment of a social work assistant specially to work with children and carers

in a Private Fostering Arrangement is now in post.

- The service is experiencing a significant increase in Family finding referrals and Family and Friends viability and assessment work. The Family and Friends work requires prompt responses in line with timescales dictated by Regulations and by the courts.
- The fostering service continued to meet the high demands of Family and Friends assessments by commissioning an independent social worker to assist with the workload in meeting very tight timescales.

Recommendations:

Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to note and comment on the report.

Full Report

1 Introduction

This report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel to meet the requirements set out in Regulation 35 and Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and point 25.7 of the National Minimum Standards.

The aim of this quarterly report is monitor both the effectiveness of the service and to ensure the service is achieving good outcomes for children. To meet this requirement, this report offers a brief summary the work undertaken by the fostering service.

2 Fostering Panel

As the number of approved foster carers continue to grow, it has been necessary to increase the frequency of the fostering panels from 4 weekly to 3 weekly. This increase commenced on the 1st January 2013. The increase in panel frequency ensures timely presentation of case work.

During this period the fostering panel met **5** times, **3** of these dates were pre-planned panels and **2** were extraordinary panels. It was necessary to increase the number of times panel met due to the number of cases needing to be presented to meet statutory timescales: **For detail see confidential annex**

During this quarter **7** panel feedback forms were received. The feedback offered was generally very positive about the panel functioning.

3 Fostering Panel Membership

During this year the service has continued to extend its panel members to better fit the diverse population of Milton Keynes and broaden the skills set of the panel as a collective body.

During this period, the recent appointments of new panel members – **For detail see confidential annex** have sat as full panel members following the satisfactory return of checks and references.

Checks and references are still being processed for the final appointee – **For detail see confidential annex**

Following the resignation of the vice chair, a new vice chair has been appointed. This individual holds a social work qualification, has an extensive knowledge of child care and is skilled in managing and chairing meetings in her previous role as an Independent Reviewing Officer.

The fostering panel has a sufficient central pool of members with the skill, knowledge and experience to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations (2011) and satisfy the Ofsted inspection recommendations.

4 Panel member's annual appraisals

During this period 1 panel member had an annual appraisal. During this appraisal it was agreed that this panel member would become the vice chair. Appraisals dates will be set with those that require an appraisal during the next quarter.

5 Foster Carer Recruitment and Approval

The fostering service has continued actively to recruit carers and undertake fostering assessments. From its launch during the last quarter, the new 'on line' enquiry form proved most successful and increased the numbers of enquires by over 100% (comparable quarter). During this period, however, the MKC council website was revised, and unfortunately this caused the 'on line' enquiry to not be available for several weeks. However, when it was reinstated, the form had been successfully upgraded.

Recruitment activity during this quarter included ongoing TV advertising in Civic offices and the MK Hospital Radio magazine. A recruitment display was pitched in the CMK Library for one week. The service did not undertake any press advertising due to the MKC website being down.

In this review period the Fostering Panel has approved **10** fostering households as follows;

- **For detail see confidential annex**

Fostering Households 2013-2014	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mainstream	128	135	134	132	129	132	131	133	131
Family&Friends and Reg 24	26	21	19	23	25	23	27	21	27
Supported Lodgings	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Total	165	167	164	165	165	166	169	165	169

Terminations of Approvals

During this time, the fostering service terminated the approval of **3** fostering households, **For detail see confidential annex**

6 Record of Ongoing Fostering Assessments

As of the 31 December 2013, the service are engaged in undertaking **36** assessments

- **Supported Lodgings:**
1 supported lodgings assessments
- **Mainstream Foster Care:**
13 assessments are currently being undertaken
- **Family and Friends:**
4 Family and Friends carers
5 Regulation 24 carers (Family and Friends assessments where children are already in place)
- **Permanence:**
6 Update Form F assessments for permanence (foster carers wishing to offer permanent foster care)
- **Family Link**
2 Family Link assessments
- **Special Guardianship Assessments: Total 4**
5 SGO assessments – **For detail see confidential annex**

* denotes information required to be included in Regulation 35 Schedule 6 reports for the fostering agency executive.

7 Permanent Matching and Family Finding

During this period **6** children were positively matched and placed with permanent carers.

For detail see confidential annex

The Permanence Tracking Meetings designed to improve placement stability and to ensure family finding referrals are submitted to the fostering service in a timely manner continues to achieve positive results. This is very much embraced and seen as a positive move in reducing delay for children requiring permanence through fostering, and has led to an increased number of referrals to the fostering service. The table below shows the increase in numbers since 2010 and the increased forecast for 2013-2014.

Number of family finding referrals	Total
2012 -2013	25 referrals
2011 - 2012	6 referrals

Number of family finding referrals	April – June Total	April - Sept Total	April – Dec Total	Total Forecast 2013-2014
2013-2014	6 referrals	13 referrals	35 referrals	40 referrals

8 Foster Carer Household Reviews

During this period, the fostering panel considered and made recommendations on the continued approval of **13** fostering households:

- 1st Household Review with no change to original approval – **2**
- 1st Household Review with a change of approval - **2**
- Other Household Review with a change of approval – **9**

The Agency Decision maker (ADM) reviewed and continued the approval of **17** fostering households.

9 Quality of Work Presented

During this period **35** reports were presented for consideration to panel and were given the following quality score:

- 15 – excellent
- 9 – good
- 11 – satisfactory

The panel members continue to be impressed by the quality of reports submitted by the presenting social workers. The fostering panel collectively contribute to the panel feedback forms and comment on the quality of reports, note any additional information required and highlight any practice and policy matters to be followed up by the Panel Adviser (team manager) and matters to raise at the monitoring group.

10 Timescales

During this period **5** mainstream fostering assessments were presented to panel for approval. The average time for the completion of these assessments was **6.7** months.

* denotes information required to be included in Regulation 35 Schedule 6 reports for the fostering agency executive.

The Fostering standards (2011) give an 8 month time scale for a fostering assessment to be completed from application to presentation at panel.

During this period, **5 family and friends** fostering assessments were presented to panel for approval. **4** children were placed with the carers under Regulation 24. Of these **1** was completed and presented to panel at **16** weeks, **2** at 25 weeks and **1** at 30 weeks. The delay was caused by DBS checks not being returned within time scale. The service now has a contact within Thames Valley Police who are able to accelerate DBS checks at 60 days. The full assessment was completed in time scale.

Regulation 24 Family and Friends fostering assessment are required to be completed in 16 weeks and 24 weeks if an extension is granted by the nominated officer.

During this period the average time scale of getting household reviews presented at panel was **12.8** months.

The Fostering Regulations (2011) state that: foster carers are required to be reapproved within a 12 month period.

11 Family and Friends – Connected Persons

During this period, the fostering team have undertaken **24** viability assessments of Family and Friend carers. **6** of these families went on to have children placed under Regulation 24 and full fostering assessments are, or have taken place.

The requests for Family and Friends viability assessments and children placed under Regulation 24 have significantly increased. This is due to the speed in which courts are requesting the assessed information and that the number of viability assessments has grown by **59%** at the same time last year. To meet this demand the service continues to commission an independent social worker to assist with the assessment work and to meet the time scales directed by court.

The team continues to hold fortnightly family and friends case discussion meetings in order that the service is aware of court deadlines and case allocation is appropriate to meet these demands.

12 Special Guardianship Orders

The fostering service continues to work with family and friends carers in undertaking SGO assessments to secure permanence for children within their extended family. **For detail see confidential annex**

13 Children placed in foster care

On the 31st December 2013 the fostering service had **178** children placed within the service.

During this reporting period the fostering service placed **41** children into foster care, of these **26** (63%) children were placed within the 'in house' fostering service.

For detail see confidential annex

Of the 15 children placed with IFA carers:

For detail see confidential annex

	April 2013	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of children in foster care	212	205	216	214	212	215	211	217	228
Of which number are MKC carers	158	153	163	159	156	159	159	154	166
% of foster placements which are MKC carers	74.5%	74.6%	75.4%	74.3%	73.6%	74%	75.3%	70.9%	72.8%

During this review period the average number of children placed within the 'in house' fostering resource has been **73%** of those children in foster care.

14 Allegations, Complaints and Significant Events

For detail see confidential annex

***Notification of Events listed in Schedule 7**

Ofsted were notified of each of the above cases as required.

15 Complaints and compliments

No complaints or compliments have been submitted during this period. The team work closely with carers and professionals to address issues as they arise.

16 Child missing from a foster home

For detail see confidential annex.

17 Use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home

During this period, there have been no recorded incidents of a child being restrained whilst being cared for within the fostering service.

18 Medication, medical treatment and first aid administered to any child placed with foster carers

Foster carers record the medication they administered to children in their care. During this period foster carers have reported on **44** children being given medication. **4** of these are for children where medication is ongoing. The other **40** are where children have received both prescribed and over the counter medication for a short term conditions/illnesses. This recently introduced reporting procedure appears to be working well.

19 Accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster carers

All minor accidents, injuries and illnesses are recorded by the foster parent on their weekly logs and are passed to the child care social worker.

For detail see confidential annex.

20 Fostering Team Staffing Matters

Recruitment of new staff

A newly appointed part time social work assistant began working in the team in November. This post is specifically to work with children and carers within a Private Foster Care Arrangement.

A full time social worker will commence 1 year maternity leave from May 2014. A request to cover this maternity leave has been presented to and agreed by CSLT.

21 Business Planning/Development/Activity

Placements - The service continues to provide the placements for the 7 children placed with MKC carers from neighbouring authorities. The average age of these children is 3.1 years. The service is currently not recruiting foster carers for children aged 0-4 years. In offering these placements the service retains carers for when the numbers of children in the lower age range increases again and brings in a small revenue to the team. No further placements have been offered to the neighbouring authorities as the numbers of children requiring foster placements continues to rise within MKC.

Internal Audit – The fostering service has been subject to an internal audit and was judged overall as “Satisfactory”, the areas looked at are:

- **Finance:** Expenditure (including payments and recovery of overpayments to parents) is appropriate, income is collected and budgets are actively managed. Judged poor.

Finance - Action Required

Payment Authorisation	Risk or Implication	Follow Up
Oversight of the payment process will be reviewed	Unauthorised payments may be made	Oversight Implemented on 30-11-13
Capital Payments		
Finance section of the foster carer termination process will be amended to include specific reference to capital finance	Repayments due may not be recovered	Amendment implemented on 31-10-13

- **Governance:** Policy, procedures and legislation are complied with. Risks are identified and managed. There is management oversight. Judged good.

Governance	No Action Required	
-------------------	---------------------------	--

- **Service provision:** The service achieves the best possible outcomes for children, ensuring carers meet children's needs. There are sufficient suitable placements which are monitored and supported as required. Judged satisfactory.

Service Provision - Action Required

Placement Disruptions	Risk or Implication	Follow Up
Disruption Policy to be adhered to	Lessons learned not formalised. Support needs not fully considered	Workshop set up to ensure compliance and learning to be incorporated into Panel training day. Implemented
First Aid training requirement to be monitored and reviewed	Appropriate action may not be undertaken in a medical emergency	Implemented 21-12-13

4 action points were identified, all of which have been implemented. A review of the judgment was made following the implementation of the actions required. The service was judged as "Good".

Integrated Children Service (ICS)

During this period the fostering team undertook specific training in respect of the upgraded Foster Carer Recruitment module. A further update is due on the 19th March 2014.

22 Team Meetings and Staff Appraisals

All eligible staff had their annual appraisal set against the 2013-2014 Team Plan. All appraisals were completed within time scale. A team planning day has been arranged for 23rd April 2014.

The team meetings continue to take place each Wednesday morning except for the first Wednesday of the month. Team meetings are minuted and are well attended by the staff group. During this period the team also used the meeting to undertake a shared presentation of the new Fostering Network - 'Safer Caring' literature.

23 Action and development set at Sept 2013

- Initial Assessment/ Visit to be made an ICS document
 - ✓ Completed and operational
- To ensure household review reminders are sent to the fostering team members on a monthly basis and improve the procedure to manage household reviews
 - This task is in the process of being transferred to ICS as a business object report
- To complete panel appraisal as required
 - ✓ Completed
- To have on-line enquiry form available
 - ✓ Completed and operational
- To have foster carers website back and fully operational
 - ✓ Completed and operational
- To review and complete a new Business Impact Analysis in partnership with Business Continuity Management
 - ✓ Completed

24 Development and action for the forthcoming quarter

- Complete panel members appraisals as required
- Recruit to the maternity cover of the fostering social worker
- Revise Finance policy
- Implement signs of safety model of case supervision
- Develop remand fostering scheme
- Deliver Fostering Panel training day

Jane Partridge
Team manager
March 2013