

MILTON KEYNES FOSTERING SERVICES REGULATION 35 REPORT 1 JANUARY 2013 – 31 MARCH 2013

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Report Summary

Purpose:

This report details the activity of the fostering service during the quarter 1st January 2013 – 31st March 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.

Performance Information:

The fostering service was inspected by Ofsted between 8th October – 12th October 2012. Three of the areas inspected were judged to be 'good' and a fourth was judged to be 'outstanding' giving the service an overall effectiveness judgment of "Good".

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.

Summary

- The panel membership has grown as 2 new professionals have been recruited and 1 new application has been received.
- During this period, 2 mainstream carers and 1 Family and Friends carer and 2 supported lodgings carer were approved
- 28 assessments are in progress, including mainstream foster care, family and friends supported lodgings and special guardianships.
- Approved number of fostering, family and friends (+R24) and supported lodgings households =**167**
- Fostering panel had increased its frequency to 3 weekly to meet the demands of a continually growing service.
- On average 76.46% of Milton Keynes children in foster care are placed in house and 74% of placement requests were met in house.

- 3 children gained permanence: 1 by being permanently matched with foster carers where the child had lived from first becoming a looked after child. 2 via SGOs being granted, taking them out of the care system. Both of these children were placed with family members.
- The work presented to panel was maintained to a high standard.
- 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.
- 2 allegations were made against foster carers and investigated under safeguarding procedures. Ofsted were notified in line with Schedule 7.
- Two new members of staff were recruited and it is expected that they will be in post during the next quarter
- The service is experiencing a significant pressure with the increase in Family finding referrals and Family and Friends viability and assessment work. The Family and Friends work is a particular pressure due to the immediacy of required action dictated by the courts.
- Foster carer questionnaires analysed and action plan devised as a result.

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 from 1st January. During this period the fostering panel met 4 times where each panel sat for a full day.

The increase in panel frequency ensures timely presentation of case work.

3 Fostering Panel Membership*

During this period the service has broadened its recruitment of panel members to better fit the diverse population of Milton Keynes and broaden the skills set of the panel as a collective body. Two successful appointments were made during this quarter. One being a white female employed as the nurse for looked after children and the other a white male employed as the primary mental health worker for children in care.

An application has also been received from a black male who is employed as an educational psychologist. He will be interviewed during the next quarter.

These appointments begin to address the Ofsted inspection recommendations to ensure the numbers, skill, knowledge and experience of the persons on the central list are sufficient.

4 Panel member's annual appraisals*

During this period the Chair of the panel and the Panel Advisor (team manager) undertook positive annual appraisals with 2 panel members.

The panel Chair also had her annual appraisal. This again was positive and was undertaken by the Agency Decision Maker, the Head of Delivery and the Panel Advisor.

5 Foster Carer Recruitment and Approval*

The fostering service has continued actively to recruit carers and undertake fostering assessments. During this period the service used local radio advertising for the first time. A 3 week campaign ran from 25th Feb – 17 March. This generated the highest level of interest and we saw the hits on the fostering website double from 400 to 800. 6 applications were received as a direct result.

Other recruitment activity included a generic advert in the MK News and a 'drop in' evening. Adverts are also continuous on the TV in the Civic offices as is the advert in the MK Hospital magazine.

In this review period the Fostering Panel has approved 5 fostering households as follows,

- 2 Mainstream foster carers
- 1 Family and Friends carer
- 2 Supported Lodgings provider

Of these fostering households, the ethnicity of the carers is made up of:

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

- 4 white British households (inc the Family and Friends carers)
- 1 black Caribbean household

One of the above households came over from an independent fostering agency. This carer has 2 MK children in placement. The move to MKC fostering service offers a significant saving to the council as agency fees are no longer paid. One of the supported lodgings carers was approved specifically for a young female in care. This female is placed in mainstream foster care with the parents of the now approved supported lodgings carers. The family have offered this young female continuity of care as she moves into independence.

Fostering households 2013	January	February	March
Mainstream	148	148	146
Regulation 24	7	8	11
Supported Lodgings	8	9	10
Total	163	165	167

The service continues to positively increase the numbers of fostering households. The service is experiencing particular pressures in meeting and managing the demands of family and friends viability assessments and subsequent court work and further assessment work.

Terminations of Approvals

During this time, the fostering service terminated the approval of 5 fostering households, these were made up of:

- 1 Family and Friends carer.
- 3 mainstream foster carers.
- 1 Family Link carer.

The family and friends carer obtained a SGO on the child. Of the main stream foster carers, one resigned due to their own business growing and them no longer being available to foster. One couple resigned due to a disagreement with the services recommendation to approve for older children, as the GP reported a back problem and recommended no lifting. These carers had requested to care for 0-4 year old. For the first time we have experienced a carer resign to join an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). These carers were originally approved by MKC when living locally. They moved to Birmingham but continued to foster for MKC for a further 5 years. This did pose a number of difficulties when children were placed in their care, not least because the children were displaced from MK. The moving of there approval to Birmingham is a positive move, and the carer will now be available to provide a local resource for have children from their area.

5 Record of Ongoing Fostering Assessments*

As of the 31st March 2013, the service are engaged in undertaking **25** assessments

- **Supported Lodgings:**
4 supported lodgings assessments.
- **Mainstream Foster Care:**
8 assessments are currently being undertaken
- **Family and Friends:**
2 Family and Friends carers
11 Regulation 24 carers (Family and Friends assessments where children are already in place)
- **Special Guardianship Assessments: Total 4**

2 SGO assessments – family and friends (1 where an ex foster carer already has 3 of the child's siblings placed on an SGO and 1 where a family member has put themselves forward for a child currently in care).

2 SGO assessments – mainstream foster carers (foster carers wishing to gain PR for the child and to take the child out of the care system).

6 Permanent Matching and Family Finding

During this period 1 child was positively matched with permanent carers. This child had been with carers since his reception into care and following the care proceedings where his best interest was deemed to be permanent foster care, the carers put themselves forward.

Since the introduction of the Permanence Tracking Meetings designed to improve placement stability for children in care the number of children being referred to the service for family finding for permanent foster homes has grown significantly. Whilst this is very much embraced and seen as a positive move in reducing delay for children requiring permanence through fostering, it does present the service with added allocation pressure. The need for this service has more than quadrupled in the last year and more than doubled from 2+ years ago.

Number of family finding referrals	Total
2012 -2013	25 referrals
2011 - 2012	6 referrals
2010 - 2011	10 referrals

7 Foster Carer Household Reviews

During this period, the fostering panel considered and made recommendations on the continued approval of 19 fostering households:

- 1st Household Review with no change to original approval – 5
- 1st Household Review with a change of approval – 1
- Household Review following a complaint – 1
- Household Review following permanent match - 2
- Other Household Review with a change of approval – 10

The Agency Decision maker (ADM) reviewed and continued the approval of 7 fostering households.

8 Quality of Work Presented

During this period 27 reports were presented for consideration to panel and were given the following quality score:

- 9 – excellent
- 15 – good
- 3 – 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.

9 Timescales

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 3 fostering assessments were presented to panel. The average time to complete a mainstream fostering assessment took 6.1 months.

10 Family and Friends – Connected Persons*

During this period, the fostering team have undertaken **12** viability assessments of Family and Friend carers. **5** of these families went on to have children placed under Regulation 24 and full fostering assessments are taking place.

The request for Family and Friends viability assessments and children placed under Regulation 24 continues to put a particular pressure on the service. This is primarily due to the speed in which courts are requesting the assessed information. To meet this demand the service has commissioned an independent social worker to assist with the assessment work and to meet the time scales directed by court.

In producing literature for family and friends going through a fostering assessment the MK Grandparents Association were asked to contribute to the draft literature. They did so with their usual enthusiasm and offered good feedback which was then incorporated into the final draft.

A meeting between senior managers, legal services and the fostering service has taken place to review the draft professional procedures and information for Family and Friends carers. This will now come out of draft and fostering staff will make presentations to the child care teams to discuss process and flow.

11 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. In this period, **2** children were placed within their extended family where Special Guardianship Orders 's were granted; taking them out of the care system and where they were placed in culturally matched family settings.

12 Children placed in foster care

On the 31.03.13 the fostering service had **169** children placed within the service.

During this reporting period the fostering service received **50** placement requests, of these **37 (74%)** children were placed within the 'in house' fostering service.

Children placed with MKC carers during 1 st January – 31 st March 2013																
Age in years	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	10	11	12	14	15	16	17
Number placed	6	5	2	1	3	2	3	1	3	2	1	3	1	2	1	1

Children placed with IFA carers during 1st January – 31st March 2013								
Age in years			9	12	13	14	15	17
Number placed			1	2	1	1	5	3

13 placements were made with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA). This amounted to 10 children (as 3 of the same children moved placements). Almost all of these children had experienced placements with in house carers, but their placements had ended and the service was not able to offer a suitable alternative placement.

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

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2013	Feb	Mar
Number of children in foster placements	216	218	220	217	215	217	208	206	204	209	215	213
Of which number are MKC carers	170	169	168	168	166	165	157	153	155	162	163	160
% of foster placements which are MKC carers	78.7	77.5	76.4	77.4	77.2	76	75.7	74.3	76	77.5	75.8	75.1

During 2012-2013 the average number of children placed within the 'in house' fostering resource was **76.46%** of those children in foster care. As a comparator to neighbouring Local Authorities this percentage is high.

13 Child Care Reviews*

During this quarter 146 child care reviews took place of which 95.6% were in time scale. Our data management system ICS is not currently able to disaggregate the figures for children placed in Milton Keynes Council foster placements. This is being addressed.

14 Allegations, Complaints and Significant Events*

During this period, the fostering service has received **2** allegations against foster carers which have been investigated under safeguarding procedures by the Local Authority Designated Officer - LADO. The allegations fell into the following categories:

- Likely or Actual Sexual Abuse – **1 – Unsubstantiated (historical allegation)**
- Likely or Actual Physical Abuse – **1 - Unfounded**

Following the conclusion of each of the allegations a foster carer household review was undertaken as presented to fostering panel, in line with the fostering service policy and procedures. Both sets of foster carers remain approved.

*Notification of Events listed in Schedule 7

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

15 Complaints and compliments*

During this period the service has not received any formal complaints or compliments. The team work closely with carers and professionals to address issues as they arise. The manager is exploring ways of aggregating this lower level feedback.

16 Child missing from a foster home*

During this period, 4 children placed in the 'in house' fostering service have been recorded on ICS as missing.

Gender	Age	Number of occasions missing	Less than 24 hours	1 to 6 days
Female (a)	13	2		4 days 3 days
Female (b)	15	1		3 days
Female (c)	16	4	1 day 1 day 1 day	8 days
Female (d)	15	1		2 days

These young girls all have a pattern of behaviour where they are regularly absent without consent due to issues with their birth mothers, carers are usually aware of their whereabouts.

However during this period they had been reported as missing on a number of occasions. On each occasion the foster carer has acted in line with policy and procedure. Safeguarding procedures were followed on each occasion with strategy meetings taking place as required.

Female (c) and female (d) are sisters. This period presented with significant trauma for these girls as they learned that their youngest sibling was to be placed for adoption.

All the females above are not part of a friendship group and are not deemed at risk of organised sexual exploitation. It is also good to note that since this time missing episodes have significantly diminished for each of the females.

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 all the above processes in their weekly or monthly logs and this information is passed to child care social workers to be held on the child's file.

The Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children now delivers specific training on the administration and storage of medicine as part of the foster carers core training under Safer Caring. The nurse has been commissioned to provide this training to experienced foster carers in line with Ofsted recommendations.

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. During this period no significant accidents, injuries or illnesses were reported.

20 Fostering Team Staffing Matters*

Recruitment of new staff *

Two new members of staff were successfully recruited during this period. A full time fostering social worker was recruited from within the team. (Social work assistant qualified as a social worker). This now leaves a social work assistant post to recruit to. The deputy team manager post was interviewed for and the successful applicant will be in post by 1st May. All necessary references and checks were completed in line with MKC HR processes and met the requirements of the fostering regulations and standards.

21 Business Planning/Development*

The annual fostering team business planning day is booked for the 8th May. Here the team will review the previous year against the set targets and will collectively contribute to the team plan for the coming year. The annual team plan will be available at the end of May 2013.

The foster carers bi-annual questionnaire was analysed and an action plan devised. Of the 150 households 25 forms were returned. There were 3 main areas of development identified

- Seven foster carer reported that they did not receive adequate information to care for the child - Two separate (3 months apart) audits of the fostering service 5 and 14 day checks will ascertain what information foster carers are receiving and in what time scale and any management action required.
- Nine Foster carers reported that they were unaware of the Camhs Support Group - Camhs support group information to be part of paper based welcome pack (currently only held on foster carers website).
- Five foster carers reported feeling unsupported and under valued by CSC staff. Work on this is required as we know this is a significant factor in carers decisions for leaving the service – Foster carer mentors will be tasked in collaboration with the team

manager to devise a training programme for new CSC where the roles and responsibilities of the foster carer will be discussed as well as the need to form a collaborative professional relationship.

During this quarter a number of foster carers have raised a concern that they had been left vacant for a time. The total number of children in foster care had reduced from **220 in June 2012** to as low as **204 in December 2012**. In order to retain our foster carers the team manager offered placements to neighbouring authorities. Currently we have **8** children in placement from neighbouring authorities. This retains our carers for when the numbers increase again and brings in a small revenue to the team.

22 Team Meetings and Staff Appraisals *

Staff appraisals will commence and be completed by June 2013. All eligible staff within the fostering team will undertake an appraisal and targets will be set against the 2013-2014 team plan.

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.

23 Action and service development set at December 2012

- **The service has an action plan for meeting the 6 recommendations from the Ofsted inspection.**

4 of the 6 recommendations are met. 2 are part met, of which the following demonstrates how these are being addressed.

We have recruited panel members who offer a range of skills, expertise and diversity but we have not recruited a person who has been in care or is a care leaver. However we do have the details of an interested party which will be further explored during the next quarter.

We continue to offer a range of educational training and resources to enhance the educational attainment for children and young people. However a collaborative strategy with the education team will offer a more coherent approach to meet this aim.

- **Conduct an audit of 5 and 14 day checks to ensure foster carers and children consistently received information and resources at the earliest opportunity.**
- **Manager to meet with Corporate Parenting Team, IRO team and TCTF to gather and offer views on common matters to enhance service delivery.**

The team manager met with all three groups during this period. General information was given in respect of the service and all questions raised by the groups were satisfactorily answered. More specifically the main practice issue raised by the Corporate Parenting Team (CPT) was that there had been a few occasions where a social worker had not been informed of a child's move to respite. As a response to this the team manager raised this as a practice matter with the team and as a consequence the dedicated duty worker will as a matter of course, ensure the social workers are informed. This will be reviewed during the quarterly meeting the team manager has with the CPT.

In respect of the IROs their main issue was the role of the fostering social worker in the child care review. This has been raised as a practice matter within the fostering team meeting and practice will be required to improve where necessary. This will be reviewed during the quarterly meeting the team manager has with the IROs.

The team manager's main practice matter with both professional groups was the need to improve the return of their comments in relation to the foster carers annual household review. This has had a positive impact and a recent audit has shown an improvement in these returns which gives professional feedback on foster carers performance.

See below for TCTF comments.

- **Foster Carers currently record all medication medical treatment administered and this is shared with the child's SW. The service to consider ways to capture this information collectively to provide overview for the service and ensure compliance with regulations.**

This has not progressed during this period and will move to next quarter.

- **Fostering team manager will attend TCTF to discuss directly with young people how the placement process can be improved.**

The team manager met with young people at the TCTF on 13th March 2013. This was a very positive meeting where the team manager spoke with the young people about the families that become foster carers, the assessment process, the training the carers are offered etc. Further to this the young people discussed what information was important to them when being placed. It was good to note that the young people had seen the MKC fostering Children's Guide supplied to them at the point of placement. They were also aware of the foster carers 'welcome book' produced by foster carers as a colourful introduction for the foster child as they as placed within a family. However the team manager also agreed to highlight the need for these books to be reviewed to make them age appropriate for the child placed. This will be raised as a practice matter for foster carers in the next edition of the foster carers newsletter and was shared with staff at a team meeting.

- **The service will continue to deliver the team business plan.**

The service is on target to meet the team business plan set for 2012-2013. This will be fully reviewed by the team at the team business planning day set for the 8th May

24 Action and development for next quarter

- Explore initial interest of adult who was in care as a child becoming panel member.
- Finance policy 2013-2014 to be operational.
- Funding of £50K to secure permanence for a sibling group of 3 to be requested by presentation to Finance Board.
- New foster carer agreement to be distributed to all carers.
- Family and Friends flow chart and literature to be shared with child care teams.
- 2013-2014 Team plan to be devised and operational.

May 2013