

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

**Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services**

**Fostering Service**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To provide the Scrutiny Committee with key information on the Fostering Service in Dudley and developments since the last OfSTED inspection in 2009.

**Background**

2. Local Authorities are required under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 (6) as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to provide accommodation for children in need who require it as a result of:
  - there being no person with parental responsibility for them
  - their being lost or abandoned
  - their carers being prevented (for whatever reason) from providing them with suitable accommodation
3. The Fostering Service in Dudley provides a comprehensive range of fostering provision working closely with the Social Work Teams to secure appropriate placements for looked after children. The Service also provides family finding for children who require permanent foster placements, recruits, train and supervises mainstream foster carers and Family and Friends foster carers and facilitates carers support groups and groups for young people in care and birth children of families who provide fostering.
4. The service delivers a specialist foster care therapeutic treatment programme known as Flipside. Flipside is an intensive placement option for a small number of children. It provides an evidence based intervention which has been nationally evaluated.
5. The Directorate has commenced a pilot project known as KEEP (Keeping Foster Carers Trained and Supported) which provides behavioural management training for foster carers both mainstream and family and friends. Over the past year this

programme has proved to be extremely successful. The programme is designed to enhance the skills of mainstream and Family and Friends carers to prevent/reduce the likelihood of disrupted placements.

### **Fostering Panel**

6. Fostering Panel has 10 members regulated by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. There have been changes in elected member representation during the past year. Due to the increase in the work of the Fostering Panel it has been decided to create additional panel membership under the 2011 regulations. This will allow for greater flexibility in member attendance. To be given consideration within the panel recruitment is the need for greater diversity amongst panel members. There is currently an under representation of black and minority ethnic panel members.
7. Fostering Panel's recommendations are assessed and approved by the Agency Decision Maker, currently the Divisional Manager for Children's Resources.

### **Fostering Placements**

8. The service currently has a total of 223 carers including Flipside and Family and Friends. Analysis of the needs of the children becoming Looked After during the last twelve months has shown a significant increase in the cases of neglect and the need for placements for large sibling groups for whom the care plan is that the children remain in placement together. There has also been an increase in the 0-5 age range, with mother and baby placement requests. More recently there has been an increase in requests for placements for young teenagers.
9. Demand for placements has exceeded our supply of internal foster carers. Nationally recruitment of foster carers continues to be challenging and this is reflected locally. Our ability to recruit new carers at a rate that keeps pace with the demand has been limited and has led to an increased use of independent fostering placements.

### **Family and Friends Foster Carers**

10. There are currently 69 family and friends carers, providing 98 placements. This area continues to grow on, and has created significant pressure on the current Fostering Services resources.
11. Within the last twelve months 37 households have been approved for specific children from within the carer's network/family.

## **Local Picture**

12. Data relating to the local profile of fostering in Dudley is shown at Appendix 1.

## **Inspection Outcomes**

13. The Fostering Service in Dudley was last inspected in March 2009. The outcome was satisfactory. Five requirements were identified which have all been actioned and completed. In addition all ten recommendations have been acted upon.
14. We are awaiting our next inspection which will be under the new National Minimum Standards and regulations introduced in April 2011. We believe that this inspection is imminent. Self assessment against the standards is an ongoing activity and those responsible for the fostering service are meeting regularly by way of preparation.
15. The recent audit of the fostering service included an additional component over and above the usual audit focus to include an audit against the new National Minimum Standards. This has proved enormously useful and whilst challenging at times due to the auditors steep learning curve with respect to understanding fostering and the nature of the business it has provided us a very useful assessment and identified key areas for development for us to focus on.

## **Recent Developments**

16. The 4 Chief Executives and Directors of the Black Country Boroughs are supporting collaborative work across the Black Country around 10 themes of work, 1 of which is fostering.
17. Work has commenced with the Black Country Authorities around the fostering theme, in the first instance these will be as follows:
  - Utilising money allocated from the DfE, we are developing evidence based programmes around multi-dimensional treatment foster care across the Black Country and alongside this the development of KEEP (Keeping Foster Carers Trained and Supported) which is aimed at enhancing placement stability. The development of multi-dimensional treatment foster care will allow a larger range of placement availability across the Black Country for the more challenging children that would otherwise be placed in external resources.

- Proposals have been made around joint marketing and recruitment which will develop a Black Country brand around fostering similar to the one which is already in place with regard to adoption in the Black Country.
- A small amount of resource has been allocated by the Chief Executives to undertake some scoping work around Special Guardianship to ensure that we have continuity of approach across the Black Country and are able to develop collaborative approaches around post guardianship support and allowances.
- Work is about to commence on the opportunities to collaborate, to consolidate fees and payment schemes across the Black Country and to develop the basis of further collaboration through training and recruitment and scoping up the possibility for a fostering in the Black Country service.

### **Fostering Framework**

18. Dudley along with 6 other Regional Authorities is part of a Fostering Framework Agreement. There are over 40 independent providers signed up to the agreement, which in effect set a pricing structure for the commissioning of independent fostering placements. The placements are procured on a spot purchase basis and depending on availability allows the Authorities to select placements appropriate to individual need against a pre arranged price.
19. The Framework was implemented in April 2011 and the early indications are that applying it to current placements it will realise significant savings to the Authority.

### **Finance**

20. The total funding for 2011/12 for the Fostering Service is as follows:

	<u>Revenue Budget</u>	<u>Other Income</u>	<u>Grant Income</u>	<u>Total Funding</u>
Internal Fostering Service (including Price Street)	768,200	0	0	<b>768,200</b>
Fostering Allowances	5,078,400	0	0	<b>5,078,400</b>
Treatment Foster Care	687,300	120,900	0	<b>808,200</b>
Intensive Evidence Based Programme Grant (KEEP/MTFC/Sector	0	0	133,000	<b>133,000</b>

Advisor)				
Independent Fostering Agencies	5,206,500	0	0	<b>5,206,500</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,740,400</b>	<b>120,900</b>	<b>133,000</b>	<b>11,994,300</b>

Budgets reflected above do not include departmental administrative recharges.

### **Law**

21. The law relating the Local Authority's duty to provide foster care services is governed by the Children Act 1989 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

### **Equality Impact**

22. The provision of a fostering service contributes to the provision of stable, secure and safe care for children looked after in order that they can achieve good life chance outcomes. It assists the Council in discharging its corporate parenting responsibilities to ensure that looked after children are not disadvantaged by being in care and that they receive the support, care and security that we would wish for our own children.

### **Recommendations**

23. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.



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