

Corporate Parenting Panel

29 September 2017



Annual Report of Fostering Service and Fostering Panels

Report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, Durham County Council

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Panel with the Fostering Services and Fostering Panel Annual report (Appendix 2)
- 2 The report outlines the work of the Fostering Service during 2016-17 and the activity of the Fostering Panels. It also outlines the future strategic direction of the service to meet the needs of the increased number of looked after children.
- 3 Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After and Permanence, will deliver a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 29 September 2017, providing an overview of the Annual Report.

Background

- 4 The information presented in the report relates to the activity within Durham County Council Fostering Service and the activity of the three Fostering Panels.
- 5 The report covers the reporting period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 for both the Fostering Service and the Fostering Panels.
- 6 The report complies with the statutory requirements as set out under Regulation 35 (review of quality of care) of the Fostering Regulations 2011. These require the responsible individual should monitor all matters set out in Schedule 7, which relate to standards of care and the overall management of the service and to improve the quality of the foster care provided by the Fostering Service.

Recommendations

- 7 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to receive the Annual Report and presentation at the meeting on 29 September 2017 and discuss, to ensure ongoing improvement of the service to meet the needs of children looked after within foster care.

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The increased numbers of looked after children is an area of budget pressure. The sharp increase over 2016-2017 has meant the service has been unable to keep pace with demand particularly those older young people or those with complex and challenging needs. There has been an increase in placements which are externally commissioned which are of high cost. These are primarily residential placements, including residential schools and Independent Foster Care placements (IFA's). Recruitment of in house foster carers is slowly increasing as part of a clear strategy within the Placement Efficiency Plan, to ensure the correct placement mix to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers.

Staffing – The increased numbers of looked after children has had an impact on the caseloads of social workers across the service and following a successful bid for additional finance a number of additional posts have been created in Child Protection Teams and Looked After Teams. An additional Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) post has also been created and a new Head of Looked After Service.

Risk – The Local Authority must ensure it adequately safeguards children who are deemed at risk of significant harm and provide suitable care where children cannot live within their families. Not to do so, places the Council at risk if children are harmed and risks a poor Ofsted outcome.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The service must ensure it has sufficient foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of looked after children who may have special needs arising from disability or their cultural or heritage backgrounds.

Accommodation– None

Crime and Disorder– None

Human Rights– children and young people have the right to a family life where they can flourish and achieve the best outcomes that they can. Where children cannot live safely within their birth families, the Local Authority must ensure it makes satisfactory and suitable arrangements for their care as children and into adulthood.

Consultation– None

Procurement– None

Disability Issues– Children and young people with disabilities or complex needs will require foster carers with special skills to meet their needs. This aspect is part of the Recruitment Strategy for the Fostering Service.

Legal Implications– Children's Services works within a clear statutory framework under the Children Act 1989 and associated legislation to ensure children and young people are safeguarded from significant harm.

Appendix 2: Annual Report of Fostering Service and Fostering Panels

Attached as a separate document