



Northumberland County Council

Families and Children Overview and Scrutiny 6th December 2018

The Annual Report of Northumberland County Council Fostering Service 2017-18

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Wayne Daley

Purpose of Report

To provide an overview of the Fostering Service 2017/18. In line with statutory guidance and regulation, all Fostering Services have to provide a report on the outcomes of the service.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1) Members note the report and its content.
- 2) Members acknowledge the report and performance information in regard to the period April 2017 – March 2018.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the priorities regarding Living, Enjoying, Connecting and Thriving priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

Key Issues

1. The service to continue to recruit, retain and maintain a stable cohort of foster carers, to meet the placement needs of looked after children.
2. To ensure foster carers receive a high level of support and development opportunities, by the service and other professionals, to assist and empower them to look after the children and young people placed with them.
3. The agency to continue to successfully operate on a day to day basis in line with the Fostering National Minimum Standards & Regulations and other relevant legislation.

Northumberland County Council
Family Placement Service
Annual Report of the Fostering Agency
1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the main developments relating to the Fostering Service during the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

2. Annual Dataset

The fostering activity for 2017/18 is collated via an annual dataset. The dataset is submitted by all Fostering Services to Ofsted. The data is then collated to give a national picture of fostering in both local authorities and independent fostering agencies. For 2017/18 Ofsted collated the data in a new format and this was submitted to Ofsted on the 30th July 2018.

3. Ofsted Inspection

The service was previously inspected under the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework for 'the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers' which incorporates fostering services into the single framework inspection process. The outcome from this inspection is that Children's Services within Northumberland requires improvement to be good.

The full inspection report can be accessed at:

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/northumberland/052_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children's%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf

Future inspections will be under the local authority children's service (ILACS) framework that was introduced in January 2018.

4. Fostering Panel

The fostering panel has a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of placements of children in foster care. The panel meets at least once a month and has an independent chairperson who has significant knowledge and experience of fostering issues. The panel advisor, panel chair and panel members all play a key role in the quality assurance of all documents that are presented to panel.

The fostering panel approve mainstream foster carers, family and friend foster carers, considers all deregistration of foster carers for monitoring purposes and foster carer annual reviews. 21 mainstream foster carers and 33 family and friend fostering assessments were approved by the agency.

The fostering panel also considers whether the permanence plan for a child should be long term fostering and the decision in regard to matching children to a foster carer long term. In 2017/18, 9 children had the plan for long term fostering recommended and the decision ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.

As at 31st March 2018, 51 children are in long term foster placements with Northumberland foster carers with a further 35 children living with family and friends foster carers.

5. Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is the Acting Head of Service, Safeguarding. The ADM is provided with all fostering panel papers and a copy of the final minutes in line with the regulations. The ADM provides any feedback to panels via the panel advisor.

No cases have been referred to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) during this timeframe.

6. Recruitment & Retention of Foster Carers

The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a priority. The Fostering Recruitment Campaign has continued throughout 2017/18. Information Evenings continue to be bi-monthly and take place in various venues across the county.

The Family Placement Service has a Recruitment and Marketing Strategy. The aim of this strategy is to recruit carers living in and within reasonable travelling distance of Northumberland who have the skills and qualities to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in our care.

The strategies for fostering recruitment are based on an analysis of practice information including current and emerging areas of need in terms of our children & young people. Targeted recruitment has taken place in regard to carers who could look after sibling groups and teenagers. This is an ongoing challenge for the agency with ongoing specific recruitment for carers for this cohort of children.

Approved foster carers have also been targeted to consider looking after children that they previously might not have considered. This has included delivering a training programme for foster carers to consider looking after children long term. The service has an allocated social worker in the team who leads and coordinates profiles of children that need a long term foster placement.

Recruiting foster carers is an on-going, year round campaign, with focus at particular time periods e.g. Foster Care Fortnight. These opportunities provide extra support from the press and social media elements of the campaign. The service meets with other local authorities in the region to draw on best practice in regard to the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

All NCC foster carers have an annual membership with Foster Talk funded by the service. Foster Talk is an independent, non-profit organisation providing professional support services to foster carers across the UK.

7. Data

The following information gives some comparisons of data relevant to the fostering service for the last 4 years:

As at 31 st March for each year	Total Number of LAC population	Number of children placed with NCC mainstream foster carers	Number of children placed with NCC family & friends carers	Total number of children with NCC registered foster carers
2014/15	365	109	41	150
2015/16	389	125	37	162
2016/17	407	155	44	199
2017/18	398	164	35	199

As at 31 st March for each year	Total Number of NCC approved mainstream foster carers	Number of approved NCC family & friends carers	Total Number of NCC registered foster carers
2014/15	85	31	116
2015/16	94	28	122
2016/17	128	42	170
2017/18	125	33	158

The service has seen a slight reduction in foster carers. This is due to a number of reasons including foster carers retiring having moved a young person on to independent living, foster carers adopting children. Despite this slight reduction in the number of approved foster carers, the number of children in mainstream foster care placements has increased.

34 children are also placed with family and friends under a Regulation 24 arrangement. This is a temporary emergency arrangement where the carers are not already approved as foster carers but are known to the child. This is referred to as a connected person who is defined as an individual who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child. The 2010 Regulations specify the assessment requirements before the child may be placed under these temporary approval arrangements.

A number of young people have remained living with their foster carers in a Staying Put arrangement. As at the end of March 2018, 2 young people aged 18 years or over, continued living with their NCC foster carer and 8 young people aged over 18 years remain living with independent agency foster carers.

8. Foster Carer Support

Foster carers are provided with a high level of support from their allocated supervising social worker. A comprehensive training programme is in place with core training being essential for all foster carers and more specialist courses are also on offer. Foster carers are able to access elearning, training provided by Northumberland Safeguarding Board and internal courses are delivered.

The fostering team are trained to deliver the 'Fostering Changes' course. This enables the staff to apply the principles of this course when supporting and advising foster carers on a range of behaviour management techniques. The course has been delivered twice over this 12 month period (this is a 12 week course) and 2 refresher courses have also taken place. This course is mandatory for all foster carers therefore will continue to be delivered on a year by year basis.

All foster carers are reviewed annually in line with the regulations, with early reviews taking place if necessary. All first annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel. At the review meeting foster carers are able to give feedback both verbally and in writing in regard to the support they have received. Feedback is also collated once a placement ends from a cross section of people, for example, the foster carer, the child, the social worker.

The service has further developed specific schemes to meet the demand for placements, this has included 24/7 emergency placement, carers who can offer long term placements. Specific targeted work and training has been undertaken with approved foster carers in regard to offering long term placements for children.

The Foster Carer Consultation Group continues to meet quarterly. This group has an agreed terms of reference and a cohort of approximately 12 foster carers who met with the managers from the service to discuss key development issues.

Various events have taken place for looked after children, children of foster carers and foster carers over the year that has included a ceilidh, trip to Whitehouse Farm, pantomime trip, Christmas Ice Skating Event, watersport taster days.

The children of foster carer group has continued to meet to participate in a number of activities. The purpose of the group is to support the children of foster carers and for children to share their own experiences of living in a household that fosters. The group is being further developed so that it can be accessed for consultation on specific issues in relation to being part of a foster carer family.

9. Foster Carer Reviews

During this timeframe, 152 foster carer reviews have taken place. The review is a face to face meeting and includes reports covering a 12 month period. Reports include information from the foster carer, child in placement, child's social worker and the foster carers supervising social worker. Following the meeting a report is completed that summarises the findings, gives recommendations and when required, this report is submitted to the Fostering Panel for consideration.

10. Reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's)

The Local Authority has continued to reduce its reliance on the number of children being placed in IFA placements. IFA's placements are resourced if the needs of the child can not be met by an in house placement, for example, large sibling groups being accommodated, assessed needs of the child.

IFA placements place a significant financial pressure on the Local Authority. Monitoring and approval systems are in place in regard to tracking these placements.

The number of children placed in IFA's as at the end of the financial year 2017/18 is:

As at 31 st March for each year	Total number of children in IFA placements
2014/15	95
2015/16	86
2016/17	60
2017/18	57

As at the 31st March 2018, 37 children have had their placement in an IFA agreed as long term.

11. Outcomes for Looked After Children

The success of looked after children is hugely dependant on the high quality care each child receives. Foster carers are encouraged to ensure they provide children and young people with the opportunity to reach their full potential in all areas of development for example, formal educational environment, recreational activities. The training that is in place for foster carers supports, equips and enhances the necessary skills to do this, for example, Making Sense of Education Services, Reading with Children & Young People.

Support is provided for looked after children from a whole range of services including the Education Support for Looked After Children's Team (ESLAC), Community Support Teams, dedicated health team for looked after children.

Children and young people in foster carer are encouraged to participate with the children in care council – Voices Making Choices.

Foster carers generally understand their role as corporate parents. Attributes of foster carers included patience, listening, nurturing, being non-judgemental, resilient with a strong ability to see the world from the child's perspective. Despite some challenging times that foster carers have had with some children, this does not deter them from continuing with their vocation of being a foster carer.

12. Aims & Objectives 2018/19

The service will continue to successfully operate on a day to day basis in line with the Fostering National Minimum Standards & Regulations and other key legislation.

The key aims and objectives for 2018/19 are:

- Continue to increase placement availability and choice ensuring the service remains inclusive and engaging to all, while maintaining a focus on a number of key targeted audiences, for example, sibling groups, older children, long term placements
- Develop the Foster Carer Consultation Group
- Further develop the children of foster carers support group
- The service to ensure it effectively delivers training that supports the developmental needs and demands of foster carers
- Improve the number of children being presented to the fostering panel for long term fostering
- Review the delivery of foster carer support groups
- Manage the potential change in the service due to the impact of the regionalisation of adoption services.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	Northumberland Fostering and Adoption Services Manual. Fostering Service Statement of Purpose. Corporate Parenting Strategy. Other relevant legislation as detailed below.
Finance and value for money:	The Family Placement Service has a budget that is closely monitored to ensure value for money in regard to the placements and provision it provides.
Legal:	Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011 (England) Children Act 1989 and 2004 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (England) The above mentioned policies, procedures and guidance.
Procurement:	None
Human Resources:	None
Property:	None
Equalities: (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment:	This report is part of the Risk Management systems in place to check on the standards and service provision of children in adoptive placements.
Crime & Disorder:	None
Customer Considerations:	
Carbon Reduction:	None
Wards:	None

Report Sign Off

Finance Officer	initials
Monitoring Officer/Legal	
Human Resources	
Procurement	
I.T.	
Executive Director	cm
Portfolio Holder(s)	

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Useful Links

- NCC Fostering Service webpage
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Looked-after/Fostering.aspx>
- Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations
www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards
- NCC Virtual School for Looked After Children webpage
<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=12414>
- Staying Put Guidance
www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above
- Foster Talk website
<https://www.fostertalk.org>
- Ofsted's framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers
www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018