



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 21 April 2011

Subject: Fostering Inspection Action Plan and update on foster carer recruitment

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1 Inspection Action Plan

The fostering inspection of 2010 carried out by Ofsted gave the service an overall rating of Good. There were seven recommendations made by Ofsted following the inspection and all of the recommendations continue to be progressed.

During the last nine months the fostering service has been actively implementing the action plan and has also supported foster carers in completing the certificate in the Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for foster care. The completion of the certificate is compulsory for all foster carers and has created an additional pressure to the service as all foster carers are expected to have completed the standards by the end of April 2011.

Many of the foster carers have also completed the mandatory Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards aiming to complete them by the end of April 2011.

The action plan will be fully completed by August 2011.

The updated action plan is attached for information.

2 Fostering recruitment

Introduction

There is a national shortage of foster carers and the ability to attract and recruit more foster carers within Leeds has been a focus of activity in the last six months.

Approvals by category and year

April 2009 to end March 2010

Category	Approvals	De-registration	Trend
Mainstream	34	29	+5
Kinship care	38	26	+12

April 2010 to end Feb 2011

Category	Approvals	De-registration	Trend
Mainstream	16	15	+1
Kinship care	40	17	+23

The most recent year end and to date statistics for the current year show a very small increase in the number of mainstream foster carers available. This is partly due to a number of carers that have been de-registered due to retirement, changes in their circumstances or for failing to meet expected standards of care.

The number of Kinship Care placements continues to show a good increase, consistent with expectations within the Care Planning, Placement and Review regulations implemented this month.

Since the adoption inspection in December 2010, a number of avenues have been vigorously pursued to improve the recruitment of foster carers enabling the fostering service to compete effectively with other Independent Fostering Agencies operating in the Leeds area.

Recruitment team

We are in the process of creating a separate fostering Recruitment and Assessment team which will operate to a clear business model and undertake the majority of assessments of mainstream foster carers. The team will also provide specialist expertise to support fostering social workers in the other teams, who will continue to undertake some assessments.

A model for a recruitment and placements team was developed in April 2010 but despite repeated attempts no suitable applicants were identified for the recruitment social worker posts. This model was reviewed in December 2010 and a Recruitment and Assessment team is in development. In March we appointed a Team Manager. In addition we have two fostering officers recently seconded into the team from elsewhere in the service and two more staff due to start in May. Interim management is provided by the placements service team manager. Further external advertising is due to take place in the next few weeks to recruit to the remaining posts within the team. An interim arrangement has been set up for managing these staff and overseeing the forthcoming recruitment campaign.

Recruitment campaign

A recruitment strategy is in place and there has been a notable increase in the number of registrations of interest since the beginning of the year following increased advertising. For example, from April 2010- December 2010 the service received an average of 11 registrations of interest in fostering per month. Since January 2011 there has been an increase with an average of 28 per month with an upward trend. This is a 50% increase in interest.

A large media campaign is due to take place in April with a four weeks radio campaign with a strap line of "Do something Amazing!" and an eight week campaign on bus backs, train and bus stations. In addition, the Lords Mayor's long service event in foster care fortnight in May will add additional press interest and advertising.

Further work is ongoing regarding improvements to the website to improve the appeal and attractiveness of the site which draws in interest from potential carers.

The development of the team and linking in with the additional resources from the wider children's services aims to increase the focus on attracting potential carers.

The targets for increasing capacity to the service for the next years are as follows:

April 2012 an increase in establishment of 20 carers

April 2013 a further increase in establishment of 40 carers

Background papers

None