

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee/Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	13 October 2020
Title:	Annual Fostering Report
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data and highlighting some focus areas for 2020/2021.

Recommendation

2. That the Children and Families Advisory Panel notes the annual update

Executive Summary

3. The Fostering Annual report 2019/2020 provides an overview of fostering activity, detailing statistical performance data and highlighting some focus areas for 2020/2021 Contextual information

Performance

4. This report provides an overview of the fostering service performance 2019-2020

Main Report:

Introduction

5. This report provides an update on Hampshire County Council's fostering service in line with fostering services statutory regulations and guidance.

6. During 2019/2020 the service successfully recruited and approved 31 new fostering households.
7. At the end of June 2020 there were 483 registered foster carers in Hampshire.
8. The Fostering Service has a marketing strategy for 2020/2021; with a target to recruit 34 fostering households. The marketing strategy has been compiled using recommendations provided by research completed by the Insight and Engagement team as part of our Modernising Placements Programme which is focussing on increasing the number of fostering households.

The Fostering Service

9. Hampshire fostering service is comprised of four teams.
10. The Recruitment and Assessment Team is a team of social workers, support worker, a marketing officer, and a panel co-ordinator. The team is responsible for marketing activity to recruit new foster carers to meet the needs of Hampshire children, visiting potential foster carers, completing fostering assessments and supporting applicants through to fostering panel.
11. There are two Fostering Support teams, East and West. The teams support approved foster carers, providing supervision and training to ensure foster carers' practice continues to meet the National Minimum Standards.
12. The Connected Carers' Assessment Team carries out assessments for fostering applicants who have a pre-existing relationship with a specific child and supports these applicants through to fostering panel.

Recruitment of foster carers

13. In 2019/20, the fostering service rebranded and became 'Fostering Hampshire Children' updating its identity, digital presence, and information materials.
14. There have been varied recruitment events held over 2019/20 including large summer events and smaller drop events. We also trialled a number of supermarket information stands.
15. During 2019/20 we launched Foster Focus Week; our first regional awareness campaign. We increased radio and social media activity, distributed printed literature, and held information events each day across the county, resulting in 17 enquiries. This will now be an annual campaign.

16. We have invested in our social media platforms, where engagement with potential foster carers has increased. Compared to 2018/19, our following on Facebook has increased by 33%, page actions +46% and impressions on Twitter have increased by 55%. On Google, our impression share increased by 55% throughout the year with a 3.2% click-through rate on average (1.9% is perceived as good on Google).

- Recruitment Data for 2019/20
Number of enquiries
493
- Number of Initial Home Visits
219
- Number of assessments initiated
64
- Number of approvals
31
- Conversion rate form enquiry to approval
6%

Fostering support

17. The service is constantly developing to ensure that we have foster carers available to meet the needs of Hampshire children.

18. This year we have introduced two new training courses which run four times per year: Child to Carer violence which supports de-escalation and understanding children's behaviour and a Relationship and Sex education course for foster carers to help them feel confident in discussions with teenagers in their care.

19. Each year we undertake a fostering survey to gather the views and experiences of our foster carers to support and improve our service. The annual foster carer survey of May 2019 provided the following results: 146 foster carers (29%) responded to the survey this year in comparison with 134 carers in 2017/18 and 112 in 2016/17. This is an increase of 5% which means we are managing to reach a larger audience. Overall, 75% of carers were able to access the training that is needed to support children in their care. 64% of foster carers felt satisfied or very satisfied with the support from the fostering service, this is consistent with the response from the previous year.

20. In 2017/18, foster carers were asked how they rated the children's team ongoing support. 29% rated this support as good or very good with 45% rating this support as okay. In comparison in 2019/20, 47% of foster carers

rated their satisfaction with children's social workers as satisfied or very satisfied which is a significant increase on the previous year. A further 22% rated their satisfaction as neutral and 31% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Whilst there has been some improvement this year, this remains a focus for the service and an area that has been noted within the service action plan. Within the Modernising Placement Programme there is a workstream dedicated to 'culture and values', one aspect of this workstream is to look at improving working relationships between children's social workers and foster carers. The service plan target for 20/21 is to increase foster carer satisfaction relating to the child social worker to 55%. The most significant area of concern from this year's results was that 41% of respondents felt dissatisfied or very dissatisfied when rating being valued as a professional. This area has been a focus of the service and wider children's service department this year. Foster carers have been involved in workshops to help shape improvements and plan the future of the fostering service as part of the Modernising Placements Programme and the service plan has noted a five year target plan for foster carers feeling professionally valued to increase year on year; Year 1 (19/20)– 41%, Year 2 - 48%, Year 3 - 56%, Year 4 - 65%, Year 5 – 75%.

21. In 2019, we held our first 'Foster Carer Get together', this was a social event for foster carers to come together and meet and talk to other foster carers. A range of managers were also present and engaged in social activities with foster carers. The feedback forms for this event were very positive and foster carers stated that they would like more events like this, which we plan to provide. However, currently plans for this have been on hold due to the disruption of Covid 19.

Connected Carers

22. In 2019, Connected Carers' Assessing Social Workers moved under the structure of the district teams to promote improved joint working. There have been some positives in this change of structure but also some challenges. Co-locating children's social workers and assessing social workers has improved joint working and sharing of fostering knowledge. There have been challenges in ensuring consistency across the county and difficulty with no central oversight.

23. Legal training has been facilitated for assessing social workers and their managers in 19/20 specifically around the expectations of assessing connected foster carers.

- Connected Carers' Team Referrals & Assessments 19/20
- Number of referrals for the year - 411
- Number allocated for assessment - 411
- Number of positive assessments - 158

24. A significant challenge remains with sections 4 and 5 of the assessment being completed in a timely manner, the target is set for these sections to be completed by the children's social worker and with CCAT within 30 days of referral. The information contained within this is essential to the assessment. In 2019/20, no assessments met this target. This remains a service plan target to improve, working closely with the Children's Social Work Teams. A roles and responsibilities document has been drafted that will be shared with the whole service which highlights the importance of this information being received early in the process and the potential outcomes for children's planning if this is not done.

Fostering Panel

25. The service has 6 fostering panels that are held each month. Each panel will hear a maximum of 5 cases.

26. All panel chairs received an appraisal in 19/20 which included an observation of practice.

27. Panel feedback from applicants is routinely sought, however limited feedback is received. We are currently working on an electronic feedback form to encourage return.

28. The Service Manager meets with panel chairs on a quarterly basis to discuss any themes in panel, issues and training and development needs. An annual panel member training day was held in 19/20 which received positive comments from attendees.

Statistics

29. At the end of June 2020 there were 483 registered foster carers in Hampshire. This does not include those carers only offering staying put as they are no longer registered foster carers. These households can be broken down into their different registrations.

Table 1: Households Broken Down by Registration

Registration (by household)	June 2020
County foster carer	343
Connected foster carer	123
Specialist Respite Care	17
Staying Put only (not approved foster carers so not included in the 483 figure of registered foster carer above)	16
Total (Foster carers and staying put only carers)	499

Foster carers on hold

Table 2: Foster Carers on hold

	June 19	Sept 19	Dec 19	March 2020	June 2020	12 month average
East	13	9	6	13	11	9.75
West	9	13	8	16	13	12.5
Total	22	22	14	29	24	22.25

30. The average number of foster carer households on hold at any one time is 22.25. These have been for a variety of reasons, including foster carers choosing to take a break, other family or work commitments, and a small number due to complaint or allegation.

Timeliness of household reviews

Table 3: Household Reviews within Timescales

% of foster carers with HHR's recorded in time	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	83%	83%	83%	74%	89%

31. There was a significant decrease in the number of foster carer households with a timely household review in Q4, this was a concern which has now been addressed. It is important to note that the service manager was absent for 5 weeks of Q4 which impacted the whole service including performance data.

Timeliness of supervision visits

Table 4: Supervision Visits within Timescales

% of foster carers with supervision recorded in time	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	75%	72%	81%	78%	94%

32. It is important to note that the service manager was absent for 5 weeks of Q4 which impacted the whole service including performance data. Foster carer supervision has been an area of focus for the team Current data (June 2020) shows an improvement to 94% compliance in this area which in part can be attributed to increased working at home during Covid 19 pandemic. The service will take learning from this time to support compliance in this area moving forward.

Timeliness of unannounced visits

Table 5: Timeliness of Unannounced Visits

% of foster carers with unannounced visits in time	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	90	95	93	90	89%

33. The service has continued to ensure a high level of compliance in completing and timely recording of unannounced visits. Completing unannounced visits in the current climate is more challenging due to less face to face visiting.

Foster Carer Medicals

Table 6: Foster Carer Medicals Overdue

Number of overdue Medical checks	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	89	76	103	137	187

34. This number of overdue medicals represents 22% of those that require a medical which gives a 78% compliance rate in this area.

DBS checks

Table 7: Overdue DBS Checks

Number of overdue DBS checks	Q1 2019-2020	Q2 2019-2020	Q3 2019-2020	Q4 2019-2020	Q1 2020-2021
	128	119	119	181	131

35. This number of overdue DBS checks represents 12% of those that require a DBS check which gives an 88% compliance rate in this area.

36. There will always be a small number of overdue DBS checks due to young people within the household turning 18 years. You are unable to complete a DBS check until a young person turns 18 years therefore this becomes over due the day of the young persons 18th Birthday.

37. Overdue medicals and DBS checks are a continuing concern. There is a process in place to initiate these checks three months before they are due, however there are challenges. We are trying to implement a system to

start these checks 6 months before they are due to try and reduce those outstanding.

38. There has been a recent change in the way we process medical forms to comply with GDPR. The medical forms now go straight from the GP to the Medical advisor instead of coming back to the department first which makes it very difficult to check and monitor where any delay is being caused. The service will be exploring potential solutions to this issue which could include an IT/ electronic system solution.
39. There is a tracking spreadsheet for all DBS checks that evidences DBS checks are being initiated in a timely way. There is some delay with foster carers not responding to the electronic link they are sent in a timely way and this step needing to be repeated. There will always be a number of DBS checks that are outstanding due to young people turning 18 years whilst in the foster placement, we are unable to initiate a DBS check until their 18th birthday which causes an outstanding check whilst we await it being returned.

Deregistration

Table 8: Carer Deregistration's

	Q1 2019/20	Q2 2019/20	Q3 2019/20	Q4 2019/2020
County carers	10	16	4	1
Connected carers	15	10	21	3
Specialist respite care	0	0	1	0
	25	26	25	4

40. Over 19/20 there have been 80 fostering households that have been de-registered, 49 of these households were connected carers of which 39 were a result of positive outcomes for the children through adoption, Special Guardianship, moving on to independent living and reunification.

41. Of the 31 county carers deregistered (including specialist respite care), the reasons were:

Table 9: Reason for County Carer Deregistrations

Reasons for deregistration	
Change of circumstances	17
Retired	2
Specialist respite care child moved on	1

Dissatisfaction	3
Death of one of the carers	1
Moved out of area	3
Ill health	2
Adoption	1
Staying put/shared lives	1

42. Of those where a change of circumstances was provided as a reason for deregistration, some of the following themes have been noted;

- 2 foster carer households struggled after taking their first placement with the impact on theirs and their children's lives
- Wanting to spend more time with family
- Change of employment
- Own family composition changed
- Family caring commitments

43. Of the 3 foster carers that felt dissatisfied with the department, two felt that they had a lack of placements, looking at both of these cases, one fostering household only cared for babies which is limiting and the other had very limited availability. The third foster carer household was an SRC carer who felt dissatisfied with having to chase payments. The service is aware of some payment delays for foster carers and as an action from this a Rapid Improvement Event was held to work on plans to resolve this which are currently being worked on as part of the Retention workstream in the Modernising Placements Programme.

44. In 2019/2020 we have initiated an exit interview process for foster carers where they give permission. This has only recently started with minimal response so far but is something that we will build upon in 2020/21.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers

45. The Council has a Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers procedure as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

46. In total there have been 123 concerns/complaints/allegations initiated within the 2019/20 period. These were concluded as the following:

Table 10: Concerns, Complaints and Allegations initiated in 2019/20

Concern	Complaint	Allegation
51	39	33

47. Of these concerns, complaints and allegations, the outcomes were:

Table 11: Outcomes of Concerns, Complaints and Allegations

Continued fostering	114
De-registration	7
Resignation	2

48. No cases were presented to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) in 19/20.

Modernising Placements Programme (MPP)

49. As mentioned above, there is a substantial transformation programme underway with the aim of ensuring that Hampshire children are provided with the right support at the right time. The needs of our children have increased over recent years, and with the success of our Transforming Social Care programme ensuring that children can remain at home wherever it is safe to do so, those children who are in our care have the most complex needs. We need to ensure that our foster carers have the skills, support and capability to respond to these needs and MPP is focussed on all aspects of the journey for a foster carer from enquiry right through to approval and support.

50. Foster carers have been involved in this programme of work and are helping to shape and develop new approaches. One of these new approaches is moving towards a Hampshire Hive model of support where a Hive Carer supports 6-10 other fostering families akin to the wider family support that many children receive from aunts, uncles, grandparents. This model will be launched in the summer for applications from foster carers to be Hive Carers and so far, has received very positive feedback. Additionally, we are considering other supports to foster carers in learning and training and changes to our skills fees model.

Hampshire Fostering Network (HFN)

51. The service continues to work closely with Hampshire Fostering Network. The service attends the monthly committee meetings and facilitates monthly operational meetings with the Fostering Service Manager, the CIC lead and HFN chair and vice chair. Although these meetings have not been held in recent months due to Covid 19, virtual meetings have been offered. The Service continues to communicate information to HFN and work closely with members when reviewing practice and policies. The service has also started communication directly with foster carers via an opt in database which foster carers subscribe to, allowing the service to share information readily and deliver a monthly service newsletter.

Conclusions

52. The Fostering Service has continued in its efforts to provide a high level of support and supervision to Hampshire foster carers. Further improvement has been made in some compliance data since April 2020.

53. 31 new foster carer households were approved in 19/20, however 31 county foster carer household also deregistered. The focus for 20/21 will be on recruitment and retention to increase our overall foster carer household numbers. Work within the Modernising Placements Programme has supported the service to identify specific groups to target within foster carer recruitment which has enabled the service to tailor marketing messages. We have a target of approving 58 fostering households in 20/21 using these new marketing messages and increasing our social media presence.
54. New training for foster carers was facilitated to enable foster carers to meet the changing needs of our looked after children. The service is currently reviewing the foster carer training pathway with a view to increasing foster carer resilience and support to care for children with higher needs and more complex behaviours.
55. Foster carers have provided feedback about the service through the foster carer survey which will be repeated in June 2020. Foster carers have also been involved in workshops to help the service plan future service delivery improvements. We also introduced an exit interview process which needs to be embedded in 20/21.
56. Referrals to the Connected Carers' Assessment Team remain high and co-location of the assessing workers has improved working relationships and information sharing.
57. New initiatives including Foster Focus Week and a foster carer get together received positive feedback and will now become annual events.
58. There remains a need to improve the process for ensuring that foster carers have medical and DBS rechecks, and this remains a focus for 20/21.

Priorities for 2019-2020

Table 9: Priorities for 2019-2020

Action	Responsibility	Target/Date to be achieved
Complaints and allegations policy to be reviewed with foster carers to ensure practice expectations are clear and a better foster carer experience in line with the Hampshire approach and strength-based working	Sarah Smith, County Service Manager Adoption and Fostering	October 2020

Foster carers are recruited to meet the service need.	Lynne Tripp, Team Manager, Recruitment and Assessment Team	58 new fostering approvals in 2020-2021
Increased number of children placed with in house foster carers compared to IFA use – Excluding placed with connected carers	Modernising Placement Programme	67% of CIC to be placed with in house foster carers compared to IFA by March 2021
Review of training and support programme to foster carers within the retention work of the Modernising Placement Programme. Training programme to include Hampshire approach awareness and strength-based approaches	Modernising Placement Programme	New training Programme agreed by September 2020
Improve foster carer satisfaction with the fostering service and carers feeling professionally valued. A range of medium term and long-term targets are detailed in the fostering Service plan extending beyond 2021.	Modernising Placement Programme Sarah Smith, County Service Manager Adoption and Fostering	70% foster carer satisfaction 40% feeling professionally valued
Continued increase in compliance in data quality reports for: a) Household Review timeliness b) Unannounced Visits c) 6 -12 weekly supervision visits d) DBS checks e) Health Assessments f) Signed Foster Care Agreements	Sarah Smith, County Service Manager Adoption and Fostering	2020-2021 compliance targets a) 90% b) 90% c) 90% d) 85% e) 85% f) 90%

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes
OR	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

This report provides an update on the overall work of the fostering service and is not proposing changes that would lead to an impact on groups with protected characteristics.