

Report of the Director of Children's Services , Education and Skills

Good and Safe Placements - Reports regarding the adoption and fostering service

Summary

1. The focus in this report will be upon the Looked After Children's Strategy with specific reference to the achievement of good and safe placements for looked after children.

Background

2. The council's placement strategy focuses upon children being placed with local foster families, where practicable. For children, who can not return to the care of their parents or extended family, there is an explicit commitment to seeking adoption families, in which they will have the opportunity to grow up in a new permanent, loving family.

The fostering and adoption services are registered with Ofsted as the regulatory authority. There is an extensive legislative base underpinned by regulation, national minimum standards and an inspection framework.

The adoption and fostering regulations require that each service report on a regular basis to the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children's Services. The reports for the annual review of the adoption service and the quarterly report of the fostering service for period January to March 2014 are submitted for consideration (appendices A and C). In addition, the annual report of the Adoption Panel chair has been forwarded for consideration (appendix B)

Consultation

3. The work of each of the officers reporting to the board is undertaken with consultation with service users e.g. foster carers, adopters, looked after children and care leavers. Feedback from York Area Foster Carers Association, Show Me That I Matter and I Matter Too (representatives of all looked after children) is regularly sought and incorporated into the service development.

Options

4. There are no options for decision, as the information provided is intended to develop the knowledge for the Board of the experience of looked after children.

Analysis

5. Adoption progress during 2013-14
 - 5.1 Improvement to the performance of adoption services nationally remains a high priority for Government. The Adoption Reform agenda is focused on increasing the number of families available for children with adoption plans and decreasing the time taken to place these children.
 - 5.2 In York, the restructure of Children's Social Care services in 2013, the designated role of Adoption Service Manager became operational in July 2013. Two additional social worker posts were added to the Adoption team in Autumn 2013, so that the team now consists of 6 full time equivalent posts, including an Advanced Practitioner.
 - 5.3 Key performance information is included in the Annual Adoption Report (Annex A)
 - 5.4 Percentage of children who wait less than 20 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

66% in York compared with a national average of 55 %. This ranks York 14th out of 152 local authorities in England.

5.5 Percentage of children leaving care with adoptions orders

York achieved adoption for 19% of children in the care system, compared with a national average of 13%. This ranks York 16th out of 152 local authorities in England.

5.6 Percentage of adopters approved within 6 months:

In 2012-13, none were within 6 months (the 6 month timescale was only introduced, along with the new two stage process, on 1st July 2013). All were approved within 9 months.

For those approved in year from April 2013 to March 2014, 61% were approved within 6 months. Out of these, 100% of those who applied after 1st July 2013 (when the timescale became 6 months) were approved within 6 months.

5.7 Percentage of adopters matched with a child within 3 months

In 2012-13 none were within 3 months, though 100% of matches for adopters were within 3-12 months of approval.

York's adopters are mainly matched with children from other local authorities, therefore matching is an inter agency process, requiring the identification of a potential child and exploratory meetings before a matching report is progressed to panel. This is a challenge to achieve within a 3 month timescale.

In the year April 2013 to March 2014,

29% of matches were within 3 months of approval;
64 % within 3-6 months; and
7% within 7 months.

6. Fostering Progress during 2013-14

6.1 The New Deal for foster carers commenced in April 2013, following extensive consultation with foster carers. It represented a commitment to a new relationship between the council and foster carers in which the valued work of foster

carers in the team of professionals supporting looked after children and young people is recognised and developed.

- 6.2 The new accreditation and grading structure for foster carers with a revised remuneration structure has been operational for one year.
- 6.3 York Area Foster Carers Association (YAFCA) continues to work closely with the Fostering Team to review progress. A survey is being developed jointly between YAFCA and the local authority to review the scheme of allowances and fees for future years. The results of this consultation will be considered in October 2014.
- 6.4 The sufficiency of local foster carers and placements remains a major priority for Children's Social Care Services. This is within the context of recognition that York's fostering demographic composition reflects the national picture. It is noted locally and nationally and locally that the largest group of foster carers are aged 50 and over. It is noted that the retirement of a proportion of these foster carers must be predicted for each year. Accordingly, the fostering team is working on addressing the issues related to publicity, targeted recruitment and both replacement of retiring foster carers and a commitment to growing the local fostering community.
- 6.5 Local placements will always be sought for York's looked after children and the data indicates that the majority of placements are with York approved foster carers and in placements which can maintain key factors in a child's life such as schools, health services and ongoing contact with parents and close family.
- 6.6 Independent Fostering Agency placements have been required in recent years due to the lack of capacity for certain children and young people. The number of placements reduced from 16 to 8 during March 2014, but this welcome reduction has been reversed in the early part of 2014-15, due to placement disruptions and increased demand for individual foster placements.
- 6.7 The recruitment strategy for York foster carers will be in conjunction with neighbouring authorities and the Fostering Network, the national representative body for foster carers.

Through succession planning, there is a commitment to increasing the overall numbers at a rate greater than simply replacement of retirees. Both the fostering and adoption service managers are attending events in York which are intended to harness the commitment of faith groups in the city and region in promoting fostering and adoption.

- 6.8 A crucial factor in any new recruitment of foster carers is responding to feedback from newly engaged recruits. It was heartening to receive particular feedback from a foster carer, who joined York's fostering community having formerly employed by a local independent fostering agency. The foster carer commented particularly on the engagement and involvement in the team of people working with the looked after child, led by the child's social worker.
- 6.9 The fostering team continues the work with all foster carers to establish a working forum at the quarterly gateway events at which several invited speakers have described the broader work of the looked after children's workforce of looked after children's support team, links with higher education at York St John University, care leavers etc. This is balanced with designated time for foster carers to meet for networking, sharing of information and ideas among themselves and to enable consultation for their feedback to the fostering team and social workers for service improvement.
- 6.10 Through valuable feedback from YAFCA on behalf of foster carers regarding the experience of the management of allegations against foster carers, it was possible for these views and experiences to be reflected both in the review of the procedures for City of York Safeguarding Children's Board and subsequent practice.

Council Plan

7. The Corporate Parenting Board will be ensuring that the work of partners for looked after children contributes to the aims of
- The Children and Young People's Plan
 - Building strong communities
 - Protecting vulnerable people

Through the positive outcomes for looked after children, the aim is for them to be able to benefit from and contribute to

- Get York moving
- Create jobs and grow the economy
- Protect the environment

Implications

- **Financial**

Not applicable

- **Human Resources**

Not applicable

- **Equalities**

Not applicable

- **Legal**

Not applicable

- **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable

- **Information Technology**

Not applicable

- **Property**

Not applicable

- **Other**

Not applicable

Risk Management

8. Not applicable

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that the Board receives the reports regarding the adoption and fostering services from the Director of Adults, Children and Education relating to the progress of the department and its key partners in progressing the actions to achieve York's vision for looked after children.

Reasons

10. The Corporate Parenting Board undertakes an overview of the work with looked after children. Consideration of the annual reports will enable to scope for discussion about progress and future plans.

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**Report
Approved**



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Eoin Rush, Assistant Director

Specialist Implications Officer(s): Not applicable

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Annex A - Adoption Service Report 2014

Annex B - Adoption Panel Chair Annual Report 2014

Annex C - Fostering Service Report January to March 2014

Abbreviations

YAFCA York Area Foster Carers Association