



Corporate Parenting Board

25 November 2013

Report Title

The role of Foster Carers in the development of skills of the Fostering Service.

Cabinet Member with Lead Responsibility

Councillor Val Gibson
Children Young People and Families

Wards Affected

All

Accountable Strategic Director

Sarah Norman, Community

Originating service

Children Young People & Families/Looked After Children

Accountable officer(s)

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Report to be/has been considered by

Corporate Parenting Board only

Recommendations for noting: To consider and review the details of development and training for foster carers approved by Wolverhampton City Council (WCC).

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To enable the Corporate Parenting Board to have a clear understanding of training and development needs of foster carers.

2. Background

- 2.1 Corporate Parenting Board requested information on how foster carers can be involved in developing the fostering service through the provision of training.

3. The Role of Foster Carers in the Development of Skills of the Fostering Service and the future training and Development Programme for Foster Carers

- 3.1 Corporate Parenting Panel has previously received information regarding training delivered to foster carers by Wolverhampton Fostering Services (September 2013). This paper further builds on the work being undertaken to ensure Wolverhampton Foster Carers are very much an integral part in the development of the fostering service. The information and examples below supports foster carers involvement in the fostering service, and our commitment to provide opportunities for them to develop their skills and future career paths.

3.2 Recruitment of foster carers

- 3.2.1 Because foster carers can bring the role to life by sharing their experiences and portray a realistic, but not off-putting view of fostering, we use five core foster carers who are currently working with our marketing and communication officer to lead the new marketing and recruitment campaign. Alongside this, approved foster carers also led information days and preparatory training for new applicants.
- 3.2.2 Two foster carers are being recruited to directly respond to the enquiries along with City Direct. They will help to filter the first enquiry, and then to act as first response to carers after the enquiry stage, prior to the initial visit. This will hopefully impact upon our ability to respond to enable training to take place quickly

3.3 Retention

- 3.3.1 Existing foster carers, who are trained as buddies/ mentors, support newly approved or inexperienced carers for up to six months. This not only enables carers to develop and enhance themselves, but this has a positive knock on effect on recruitment and retention.

3.4 24 hour helpline

- 3.4.1 This line is staffed by approved foster carers who offer an invaluable support service, guidance and advice to carers that might be experiencing difficulty with their placement, or just needing information, or sign posting to other services.

3.5 Training facilitation

3.5.1 Foster carers have a very active role in various training sessions, including the pre-approval, Skills to Foster Training, in conjunction with the fostering supervising social worker.

3.6 Children Workforce Development Council Workbook

3.6.1 Foster carers lead support groups to assist new carers to explore evidence to support the completion of their standards workbook.

3.7 Support Groups

3.7.1 Foster carers co-ordinate a range of thematic groups such as, moving on, black and ethnic minority groups, family and friends group.

3.8 Safeguarding Child Protection allegations

3.8.1 Experienced foster carers provide advice and support, and act as advocates throughout investigations, and also accompany foster carers to fostering panel as necessary.

3.9 Men Supporting Men group

3.9.1 This new resource will be led by a cohort group of men and aims to provide a full support service to all male carers in the way of advice, topic related workshop and training sessions, as well as mentoring all our newly approved male carers.

3.9.2 There will be a small amount of funding initially required to create website and relevant newsletters/flyers for advertising and promoting this new resource service.

3.10 Accredited Courses / Qualifications

3.10.1 Although we have had several foster carers who have completed NVQ Level 3 in either Health and Social Care or Early Years, which has given them the opportunity to seek employment within various childcare settings to fit around their fostering commitments, it has been acknowledged for some time that many foster carers wish to further their skills and knowledge via a more formal, recognised or academic qualification. To this end we are exploring further opportunities for our foster carers to develop and enhance their skills and their individual career paths.

3.10.2 With that aim, we are in the process of accessing more details of the new partnership arrangement between the Open University and The Fostering Network. The scheme will enable foster carers to access a range of courses and opportunities to enable them to attain formal qualifications.

3.10.3 The Open University approach to learning will hopefully remove some of the barriers to professional development that foster carers have previously faced. Therefore, it will make it easier for foster carers to access formal academic training and gain qualifications. This in turn can only help our carers develop their skills and abilities in caring for vulnerable children, as well as giving carers the confidence to obtain recognised professional qualifications.

3.11 Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce

3.11.1 This qualification appears to be the ideal course to enable foster carers to develop their individual career pathways. The diploma is aimed at those who wish to work, or currently work with children aged 0-19 years. It consists of assessments and work base assignments and observations. The modules cover a wide range of topics applicable to working with young people, which would enhance carers skills and knowledge whilst working with children and young people. There are 3 pathways of learning within this diploma, and carers would have to pick the route which is most applicable to their fostering role.

3.11.2 Mature students are not expected to have completed Levels 1 and 2 prior to starting the diploma, if they can evidence written competence via an initial assessment and have previous qualifications.

3.11.3 If we were to consider offering funding to carers to gain this qualification, we would have to put into place very strict criteria for application. We would only consider carers that are already currently active with supporting the department with recruitment, training, support and similar fostering activities. Following the qualification, carers would also be expected to continue this support and use their newly acquired skills and knowledge to support other foster carers and the fostering team in a variety of ways.

3.11.4 Fees for this course currently stand at £1,425 per year. However, there is an advanced learning loan system for those over 24 years old.

3.12 Level 1 Award in Childcare

3.12.1 This is a possibility for some of our carers who wish to progress in their career, but currently have no formal qualifications. It is a short part-time course run by Walsall College covering all the basic elements of working in any childcare field. The natural progression would be through Level 2 to the Level 3 Diploma.

3.12.2 Walsall College are prepared to offer this course specifically to a group of our foster carers. Fees are yet to be agreed.

3.12.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that further qualification might be part of individual foster carer's career progression, consideration would need to be given to the implication of such an initiative for the future retention of foster carers.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The total approved revenue budget for 2013/14 for the Fostering Service is £4.5 million, of which £148,000 has been set aside to fund any costs associated with the training of foster carer's.
- 4.2 Any costs that may arise as a result of implementing the training proposals mentioned in the body of the report will be met from within this current allocation.

[NM/11112013/V]

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Fostering Service, in accordance with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, delivers the Council's statutory functions under the Children Act 1989, particularly with regard to the duty to ensure that there is sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of its looked after children population.

[TC/15112013/E]

6. Equalities Implications

- 6.1 The work of the Fostering Service helps to support the outcomes of some of Wolverhampton City's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. There is a clear duty placed upon Wolverhampton City Council to contribute towards improving and enhancing the lives of looked after children.

7. Environmental Implications

- 7.1 There are no known environmental implications.