

Individual Decision

The attached report(s) will be taken as
Individual Portfolio Member Decision(s) on:

Wednesday, 2nd September, 2015

| Ref: | Title | Portfolio Member(s) | Page No. |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| ID2901 | Annual Report 2014/15 of the West Berkshire Adoption Service | Councillor Lynne Doherty | 3 - 18 |
| ID2902 | Annual Report 2014/15 and Statement of Purpose 2015/16 of the West Berkshire Fostering Service | Councillor Lynne Doherty | 19 - 46 |



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Individual Executive Member Decision

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title of Report: | Annual Report of the West Berkshire Adoption Service |
| Report to be considered by: | Individual Executive Member Decision |
| Date on which Decision is to be taken: | 2 Sept 2015 |
| Forward Plan Ref: | ID2901 |

Purpose of Report: To report on the work of the adoption team.

Recommended Action: To agree report

Reason for decision to be taken: To comply with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services 2003
The department has a statutory responsibility to report on the work of the adoption service to Elected Members on a six monthly basis and also to agree the Statement of Purpose for this service

Other options considered: N/A

Key background documentation: N/A

| Portfolio Member Details | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Name & Telephone No.: | Councillor Lynne Doherty |
| E-mail Address: | ldoherty@westberks.gov.uk |

| Contact Officer Details | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Name: | June Kemp |
| Job Title: | Team Manager |
| Tel. No.: | 01635 503103 |
| E-mail Address: | jkemp@westberks.gov.uk |

Implications

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Policy: | The report is in line with the Council's policies regarding Looked After Children |
| Financial: | None arising from the report |
| Personnel: | N/A |
| Legal/Procurement: | The report complies with the legal requirements of the Care Standards Act |
| Property: | N/A |
| Risk Management: | N/A |

| Is this item relevant to equality? | Please tick relevant boxes | Yes | No |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and: | | | |
| • Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently? | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered? | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
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| Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality) | | | |
| Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Not relevant to equality | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Consultation Responses

Members:

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Leader of Council: | Councillor Gordon Lundie |
| Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman: | Councillor Emma Webster |
| Ward Members: | All Members |
| Opposition Spokesperson: | Councillor Mollie Lock |

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted:

Trade Union:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Is this item subject to call-in? | Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No: <input type="checkbox"/> |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 This report has been produced in line with the Adoption Services Regulations 2011.
- 1.2 This is circulated on an annual basis to inform the Council of the team's activities regarding the recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters. It also covers post adoption support services.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 2.1 There is no decision to be made therefore an Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 As this report meets the exception criteria set out in the Individual Decision making protocol this decision can be made by the Portfolio Holder under delegated authority.

Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Adoption Service Annual Report 2014-15

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ADOPT BERKSHIRE

Adoption Agency Annual Report 2014/2015



Working Together...
...Creating Families

Adoption Agency Annual Report 2014/2015

This document should be read in conjunction with the Adopt Berkshire Statement of Purpose 2015/16.

Introduction:

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Borough Council joined their Adoption services on 1st December 2014 to provide a dedicated service for adoption across the four local authorities. The shared adoption service is Adopt Berkshire. A service agreement, service specification and three year budget agreement are in place for the service.

The main priorities of Adopt Berkshire are:

- To achieve the placement of children in care for whom adoption is the Care Plan, with appropriate approved adopters, matched according to the children's specific needs and circumstances and within appropriate timescales.
- To recruit, prepare and assess adoptive applicants who are likely to be able to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.

The needs of the children requiring placement are the agency's paramount consideration.

In addition Adopt Berkshire manages a Notified Adoption Service on behalf of the four contributing authorities.

Adopt Berkshire is hosted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, but the main office base is situated within Wokingham Borough. A Management Board has been established and includes a senior management representative at second tier, Assistant Director level, from each of the contributing authorities. The Board will meet quarterly and Terms of Reference for the Management Board are in place, with clear expectations regarding its purpose and agenda setting for the service.

Legislation, Regulations and Guidance:

There is a range of Legislation, Regulations and Guidance, which influence the working of Adoption Agencies. These include:

- The National Minimum Standards for adoption (2011);
- The Adoption Act 2002 and Adoption Statutory Guidance 2011;
- The Care Standards Act 2000;
- The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 and supporting statutory guidance and regulations;
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and accompanying statutory guidance;
- The Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011).

The key requirements of all Local Authority Adoption Services are that:

- The focus is firmly on the needs of the child, whose needs will be paramount in all decisions relating to adoption;
- Highly skilled professionals lead a quality service delivered to National Minimum Standards (revised in February 2011);

- A permanency plan is identified for all children in care within 4 months of them coming into Local Authority care. (This may be a return home, or any of a range of different placement options, one of which is adoption);
- Focused effort goes into finding permanent families for all children in care waiting to be adopted;
- A range of potential adopters are welcomed and assessed efficiently in an open and fair way;
- Children and their adoptive families have easy access to adoption support services.

In terms of providing Adoption Support Services:

- At the current time The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Borough Council all continue to provide post adoption services ‘in-house’; this includes provision of birth records counselling for adopted adults and support, where appropriate, to birth parents and others affected by adoption (Adoption and Children Act 2002). The provision of post adoption support services is not within the remit of Adopt Berkshire.
- Placing authorities have a responsibility to provide support services to the children that they place for adoption and to their adoptive families until three years after any adoption order is granted.
- Local authorities have a duty to provide an Assessment of Need for post adoption support services for any adopted child, his/her adopters and/or other members of the adoptive family who live within the local authority’s area, at any stage that support is requested, and while there is not a presumption that an assessment will automatically lead to the provision of services, local authorities are required to ‘act reasonably’ in the light of any assessments undertaken.
- Financial support to adoptive placements does not have to be agreed at the time of placement for it to be paid during the child’s later childhood. Placing authorities are required to consider agreeing the payment of an adoption allowance or one-off or periodic payments to meet particular financial needs predicted at the time of placement, and adopters can approach the placing authority at any time prior to or during the three years following the legal adoption of a child to request financial support. Once a child has been adopted for three years his/her adopters can approach the local authority in whose area they live at any time until the adopted child reaches the age of 18 years, to request financial support. If approached the responsible authority is required to complete an Assessment of Need and to then ‘act reasonably’ in the light of this.

The National Minimum Standards – Adoption:

The Adoption National Minimum Standards came into force in April 2003 and were updated in April 2011. Local authority adoption agencies are expected to fully comply with the Minimum Standards which cover all areas of an agency’s responsibilities and function. (The Standards can be viewed on www.dh.gov.uk).

Adopt Berkshire’s Statement of Purpose and procedures are fully compliant with both the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised February 2011) and the revised Adoption National Minimum Standards.

The Current Government Review of Adoption:

The profile of adoption has continued to be raised in the public arena throughout the past year.

The Children and Families Act 2014 (given royal assent on the 13th March 2014) introduced a number of reforms relating to adoption, intended to enable positive change to all areas of the adoption process and to prevent delay for children. The key areas related to adoption include:

- The Act requires local authorities to consider placing children with family and friends carers in the first instance but if this is not appropriate then attempts must be made to place a child in a Fostering for Adoption arrangement with approved adopters;
- It repeals the requirement that ‘due consideration’ is given to children’s racial, religious, cultural or linguistic background when matching them with adopters in an attempt to reduce the time that black and minority ethnic children wait for an adoptive placement;
- From April 2015 adopters can share parental leave around their child’s placement and adoption leave and pay will reflect the entitlements available to birth parents. Since 30 June 2014 flexible leave requests have been extended to all employees with a duty on an employer to consider requests in a ‘reasonable’ manner;
- Adoption agencies are required to inform adoptive parents about the adoption support services available locally, their right to request an assessment for adoption support and the support the council is required to provide;
- Since April 2014, schools in England have received additional funding through the Pupil Premium Plus for children adopted from care on or after 2005;
- Since April 2014 the Public Law Outline, introduced in July 2013, has come into full effect to reduce the duration of Care Proceedings.

Consortium Arrangement:

Separate to the creation of Adopt Berkshire, the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Borough Council all continue to be part of a formal Adoption Consortium arrangement with each other and with Reading Borough Council and Slough Borough Council. This arrangement enables the six local authorities to provide a range of services in line with current requirements on local authorities, that it would otherwise be difficult for any of the authorities to provide cost-effectively, due to the low level of demand.

As part of the Consortium arrangement each of the Berkshire Unitary Authorities contribute to the funding of the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service, which is hosted by the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead.

The Service provides a number of joint resources for the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, including:

- Managing and servicing the Authorities’ Adoption Panel;
- Managing the Berkshire Information Exchange and the Post Adoption Direct Contact Service between adoptive families and birth families;
- Providing specialist advice and assistance to staff in the six Unitary Authorities on complex adoption matters;
- Assistance with training of staff, adopters and panel members;
- Administration and servicing for the closed children’s records and adoption records;
- Hosting the Birth Relative Service (providing independent counselling for birth parents and relatives when children are to be placed for adoption).

The Service Leader for the Adoption Advisory Service also holds the role of Service Leader for Adopt Berkshire, which ensures a dovetailed service for the local authorities which are part of both services. The role of the Advisory Service and the wider Consortium Arrangement has remained unchanged by the formation of Adopt Berkshire.

Statement of Purpose and Recruitment Plan

Adopt Berkshire has a Statement of Purpose and a written plan relating to the recruitment of adoptive parents which is compliant with all current legislation, regulations, standards and best practice guidance. This is available to all four contributing authorities and their Members and to all Service Users who engage with the Service. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed two yearly while the Recruitment Plan will be reviewed annually.

Data on Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31st March 2014

On the 30th September 2014 the Department of Education released Children in Care statistics for the year to 31st March 2014; making the following observations about the national picture of adoption for children:

- The number of Children in Care was continuing to rise:
There were 68,840 Children in Care at 31st March 2014, an increase of 1% compared to 31st March 2013 and an increase of 7% compared to 31st March 2010. The numbers have increased steadily over the past 5 years.
- More children had started to be looked after :
There were 30,430 children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31st March 2014, an increase of 5% from 2013 and an increase of 8% from 2010.
- More children had ceased to be looked after:
There were also 30,430 children who ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31st March 2014, an increase of 6% from 2013 and an increase of 20% from 2010.
- Adoptions were still increasing:
There were 5,050 Children in Care adopted during the year ending 31st March 2014, an increase of 26% from 2013 and an increase of 58% from 2010. Although the number of Children in Care who were adopted fell between 2010 and 2011, the number of these adoptions had since increased and was at its highest point since the start of the current data collection in 1992.

Statistical information covering the year April 2014 – March 2015 will be available at the end of September 2015 and will be reported in the next half-yearly report (October 2015), however it is known that nationally the number of children available for adoption has fallen considerably during the last 12 months.

Comparative Data for the Adopt Berkshire Unitary Authorities – 1st April 2014 / 31st March 2015:

Children for Placement

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Children for Placement | Bracknell | RBWM | West Berkshire | Wokingham |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Number of new Placement Orders 2014/2015 | 7 | 4 (+ 1 parental consent) | 10 | 2 |
| Number of new ADM (Child for Placement) decisions since 1st April 2014 | 6 (+ 1 relinquished and 2 Placement Order not agreed) | 4 (+1 relinquished and 1 Placement Order not agreed) | 10 | 1 |
| Children matched in 2014/15 - average no of days between Placement Order and formal match | 452 (8 children) (+ 1 relinquished infant placed) | 295 (8 children) (+ 1 relinquished infant placed) | 194 (6 children) | 170 (3 children) |
| Average no of days between entering care and placement 2014/2015 (using FfA placement date if applicable) | 712 (8 children incl. 1 relinquished) | 591 (9 children incl. 1 relinquished) | 498 (6 children) | 511 (3 children) (1 High Court appeal) |
| Children with a Placement Order waiting matching (31st March 2015) | 10 (4 requiring PO rescinding) | 0 | 11 (3 requiring PO rescinding) | 1 |
| No of children adopted since 1st April 2014 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 4 |

Prospective Adopters

| Prospective Adopters | Bracknell | RBWM | West Berkshire | Wokingham | Adopt Berkshire |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Number of new RoI received (units) | 6 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 22 |
| Number of new adopters approved(units)* | 8 | 9 | 11 | 13 | - |
| Average length of time | 31.8 | 39.0 | 47.8 | 38.5 | - |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|----|-------|---|
| between application and approval (weeks) | | | | | |
| Percentage of decisions made within 6 months of application | 37.5% | 11.0% | 0% | 15.0% | - |

*Note this attributes all approved adopters approved prior to the 31st March to the Authority who started the application with them

The Adoption Scorecard:

The Adoption Scorecard is produced by the Children, Young People and Families Directorate of the DfE. It is issued on an annual basis and shows the performance of all Local Authority Adoption Agencies over the previous three years. The first Scorecards were issued in 2011 and the information gathered has since been refined. The current target timescales are that all local authorities should:

- Achieve ‘matching’ for children who have a Care Plan for adoption, within 121 days of receiving Court Authority to place the child for adoption;
- Place children who have a Care Plan for adoption with their prospective adoptive families within 487 days of the child being received into local authority care;
- Complete the preparation, assessment and approval of prospective adopters within 26 weeks of accepting their application.

Adopt Berkshire is streamlining the previous procedures operated within the contributing authorities in order to ensure that target timescales are more regularly achieved. Early indicators are that this is proving successful and that children on referral to the service are being matched to prospective adopters more quickly than was previously the case. Future six monthly reports on the service will include detailed analysis of the timescales achieved in both matching children in care to their prospective adoptive families and in preparing and assessing prospective adopters applying to the service to be approved to adopt.

The Inspection of Local Authority Adoption Agencies:

Adoption Services are now inspected as part of OFSTED’s new Single Inspection Framework for Child Protection and Looked After Children which was introduced in September 2013 and which also includes inspection of local authorities’ fostering and adoption functions. Adoption Agency work is given a separate judgment within the wider inspection framework.

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and West Berkshire Councils’ Children’s Services were both subject to OFSTED Inspections in March 2015. Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council’s Children’s Services Inspections are both due.

Adoption Support Services:

As detailed above, the provision of post adoption support services is not within the remit of Adopt Berkshire, rather each of the four contributing authorities continue to manage their own Adoption Support services ‘in-house’ at the current time. Given this this will be reported on elsewhere.

It should be noted that the Current Government Review of Adoption is likely to result in increased demands on local authorities to provide high standard comprehensive adoption support services, The Expert Working Group that reported in 2012 identified adoption support as one of the most important areas for reform and a new statutory duty has been placed on local authorities to inform prospective

and approved adopters of their rights and entitlements to adoption support. Adopted children are now entitled to the same priority in terms of school admissions as Looked After Children and since September 2014 they have been eligible for free early years education from two years of age.

The government is also proposing to put more choice into the hands of adoptive parents by piloting personal budgets for adoption support in a number of local authority areas. Where local authorities have agreed to provide adoption support, personal budgets will enable adoptive parents to exercise more choice and control over the type of support provided and the provider of that support. The proposal is that legislation will be introduced to allow a full role-out of personal budgets for adoption support in due course.

In recognition of the increasing demand for post adoption support services the government is in the process of setting up a new Adoption Support Fund which will accept applications from the 1st May 2015. The fund is being established because many families need some kind of support following adoption and too many have in the past struggled to get the help that they have needed. The Fund will be available for children up to and including the age of 18 (or 25 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health & Care Plan) who have been adopted from local authority care in England or adopted from Wales but living in England. Full details of the fund can be accessed at: www.first4adoption.org.uk

Local authorities will be able to submit applications for funding before an Adoption Order, so that any package of support from the time of placement can be continued once the Adoption Order is made. To access the Fund, a child's prospective or legal adopters will need to have an Assessment of Need for Adoption Support completed by the responsible local authority (the local authority that placed the child up until three years after the granting of the adoption order, and thereafter the local authority where the child is living).

Where the assessment identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial, the local authority can apply to the Fund which, where the required criteria are met, will then release funding to the local authority. The Fund will provide money for a range of therapeutic services geared towards:

- Improved relationships with friends, family members, teachers and school staff;
- Improved engagement with learning;
- Improved emotional regulation and behaviour management;
- Improved confidence and ability to enjoy a positive family life and social relationships.

To achieve these outcomes the Fund will pay for a range of therapeutic support and services.

Each local authority is responsible for administering and reviewing its own Adoption Allowance Scheme in line with legislative requirements.

Complaints:

Adopt Berkshire has a number of systems in place to actively seek feedback from Service Users (these are detailed in the Adopt Berkshire Statement of Purpose). In the four months, 01.12.2014 – 31.03.2015 no formal complaints were received in respect of any aspect of the Adoption Service.

Challenges and priorities for the year ahead:

- The Service is committed to consolidating new ways of working aimed at:
 - Reducing the average time that children wait to achieve adoptive placements (target for 2014/15 – 75% of children not deemed to be 'hard to place' to be 'matched' within 121 days of receiving Court authority to place);

- Speeding up the recruitment of prospective adopters (target for 2014/15 – 75% of prospective adopters’ assessments to be completed within 26 weeks);
- Increasing the use of Fostering for Adoption, particularly in respect of the placement of very young children and ensuring that it is considered for all children who have an adoption plan.
- Adopt Berkshire is the pilot agency for the Cornerstone Partnership which is funded by the Department for Education. Adopt Berkshire will continue to work with the Cornerstone Partnership, developing collaborative ways of working with experienced adoptive parents in order to:
 - improve the experience of adopters,
 - speed up the placement of children for adoption,
 - ensure the stability of adoptive placements,
 and,
 - reduce the demands on social work hours.

This will be achieved through Cornerstone:

- supporting the recruitment of prospective adopters for older children and those considered more difficult to place,
- providing mentoring support to prospective and approved adopters,
- providing specialist post approval / pre-placement training based on a didactic developmental parenting perspective.

The contribution that the Cornerstone Project makes to the services being provided will be fully evaluated during the coming year.

- The national target for the average number of days between children entering care and being placed for adoption has this year been reduced to 487 days. Adopt Berkshire will support the four contributing authorities in achieving early permanency planning which will enable them to achieve this revised timescale for at least the majority of children who have an adoption plan;
- Adopt Berkshire will devise new ‘How To’ Guides aimed at supporting social workers in managing the adoption process.

Conclusion:

It must be acknowledged that the landscape of adoption has changed during the past twelve months with a fall in the number of children who are available for adoption. This is the result of a legislative interpretation by the judiciary of the government adoption agenda and has resulted in a 46% drop in the number of children available for adoption across the country. As a result of this there are now far more adopters available for young children and positively Adopt Berkshire has many adopters who will consider Fostering for Adoption for young infants.

The challenge in the coming months will be to increase recruitment of prospective adopters for older children, sibling groups, those from a black and minority ethnic background and those with additional needs. A new project called Diligent Family Finding will be introduced to support the early identification of families for these children. Additionally, in a ground breaking initiative, supported by the Department for Education, Adopt Berkshire will (as detailed above) be working closely with the

Cornerstone Partnership to improve the recruitment of prospective adopters and the support and training of approved and waiting adopter.

Whether the number of children with a plan for adoption will continue to fall or will begin to rise, is not known but Adopt Berkshire will be in a good position to respond in a timely manner to requests for adoptive placements and will continue to develop services and consolidate working relationships with the four local authorities for whom it offers the service.

**Hilary Loades,
Team Manager,
Adopt Berkshire**

**Alyson Graham
Service Leader,
Adopt Berkshire**

11 May 2015

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Individual Executive Member Decision

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title of Report: | Annual Report and Statement of Purpose of the West Berkshire Fostering Service |
| Report to be considered by: | Individual Executive Member Decision |
| Date on which Decision is to be taken: | 2 nd September 2015 |
| Forward Plan Ref: | ID2902 |

Purpose of Report: To report on the work of the adoption team and to enable Members to scrutinise the operation of the Fostering Service.

Recommended Action: To agree report.

Reason for decision to be taken: To comply with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2003
The department has a statutory responsibility to report on the work of the Fostering service to Elected Members on a six monthly basis and also to agree the Statement of Purpose for this service.

Other options considered: N/A

Key background documentation: N/A

| Portfolio Member Details | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Name & Telephone No.: | Councillor Lynne Doherty |
| E-mail Address: | ldoherty@westberks.gov.uk |

| Contact Officer Details | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Name: | June Kemp |
| Job Title: | Team Manager |
| Tel. No.: | 01635 503103 |
| E-mail Address: | jkemp@westberks.gov.uk |

Implications

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Policy: | The report is in line with the Council's policies regarding Looked After Children |
| Financial: | None |
| Personnel: | N/A |
| Legal/Procurement: | The report complies with the legal requirements of the Care Standards Act |
| Property: | N/A |
| Risk Management: | N/A |

| Is this item relevant to equality? | Please tick relevant boxes | Yes | No |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and: | | | |
| • Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently? | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
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| Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality) | | | |
| Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia | | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Not relevant to equality | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Consultation Responses

Members:

Leader of Council: Councillor Gordon Lundie

Overview & Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman:

Councillor Emma Webster

Ward Members: All Members

Opposition Spokesperson: Councillor Mollie Lock

Local Stakeholders:

Officers Consulted:

Trade Union:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Is this item subject to call-in? | Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No: <input type="checkbox"/> |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|

Supporting Information

1. Background

- 1.1 This report has been produced in line with the Fostering Services Regulations.
- 1.2 This is circulated on an annual basis to inform the Council of the team's activities regarding the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes

- 2.1 There is no decision to be made and therefore no Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 As this report meets the exception criteria set out in the Individual Decision making protocol this decision can be made by the Portfolio Holder under delegated authority.

Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Fostering Service Annual Report – April 2014 to March 2015
Appendix B – Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2015-2016

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WEST BERKSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

Annual Report – April 2014 to March 2015

Introduction

This Annual report should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2015 - 2016. The Statement of Purpose sets out the legislative and regulatory context under which West Berkshire Council carries out the functions of the fostering service.

This report provides details of activity over the financial year April 2014 - March 2015, and plans for the forthcoming year.

Fostering Panel

Membership of panels and their functions in respect of approving, reviewing and terminating approvals are now set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Children Act Guidance Volume 4 Fostering Services 2011. Fostering panels have a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care for children.

The Fostering Panel has various functions, including responsibility for approving foster carers and the numbers and ages of children for whom they are approved. Approval can be as follows: Short Term, Long Term/Specific Respite, Relief Care, Short Breaks Care, Parent and Child Placements, Supported Lodging, Emergency Placements as well as Temporary Approvals. Panel oversees the foster carers' first reviews and any subsequent reviews that may need panel's consideration. Panel also has a role in permanency planning where long term fostering is considered the best option.

The panel has continued to meet on a monthly basis, usually on the second Thursday morning of each month. Eleven panels were held throughout the year dealing with a variety of business with one Training/Business panel taking place. Panel are kept up to date with relevant legislation and changes in practice. During the year we have considered, E smoking and paperless panels.

Looking to the future the Panel would benefit from further development through widening the experiences of panel members, for example having a more balanced gender membership, a health representative and someone with wider experience in diversity.

Panel Membership

Panel membership this year has been as follows:

| Name | Role | Comment |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Ros Whittaker | Independent Panel Chair | Current |
| David Allen | Elected Councillor Rep | Current |
| Sue Tarrant | Fostering Service Rep | Extended sick leave |

| | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Clare Minchin | Children and Families (inc Disabled Children) Rep | Current |
| Sarah Holderness | Children and Families Rep | Current |
| Kate Pike | Education Service Rep | Current |
| Keith Langley | Fostering service Rep | Current |
| Andreea Pop | Fostering service Rep | Current |
| Tina Williams | Fostering Service Rep | Current |
| Charlotte Inglis | Foster care experience | Current |
| Vikki | Foster carer | Current |
| June Kemp | Panel Adviser | Current |
| Helen Benn | Panel Administrator | Current |

The 2011 Guidance and Regulations allow panel members to remain on the Panel with no maximum or minimum tenure. This enables those panel members who choose to remain on the panel the opportunity to do so. Fostering panels do not have fixed membership. Panel members are drawn from a 'central list' of people with the qualifications and experience to be a panel member although the ability of the panel to function cohesively and with a level of consistency must be taken into account. All panel members receive annual appraisals.

This year has seen a change in panel membership with one member resigning due to other duties and one who remained on long term sick leave. We have, however, recruited two new central list members with fostering/children and families experience.

All panel members approach the task conscientiously, studying the papers in advance and preparing thoroughly for the meetings. The proceedings are ably chaired by Ros Whittaker and excellently organised and recorded by Helen Benn.

PANEL BUSINESS

Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 14 to March 15)

There have been 11 panel meetings this year.

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Fostering Panel Business | |
| Cases Heard | |
| New Approvals | 5 |
| New Short Breaks approvals | 2 |
| Full Approval Family Friends/Connected Person | 5 |
| Total Number of newly approved carers including Family, Friends and Connected Persons full approval | 12 |
| Temporary Approval of Connected Person | 15 |
| Temporary Approval that went on to SGO | 6 |
| Temporary Approval arrangements that ended | 8 |
| Temporary Approval extensions | 9 |
| First Reviews | 6 |
| Changes of Approval | 6 |
| Issues of Concern/CP | 3 |
| Updates | 12 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|
| Private Fostering Arrangements | 1 |
| Exemptions | 3 |
| Qualifying Determinations | 3 |
| Cases Deferred | 0 |
| Resignations/Deregistration | 8 |
| Applicants not approved | 0 |
| Representations | 0 |
| Total number of items considered | 92 |

Summary of Foster Carer Resignations and De-registrations (April 14 to March 15)

| Resignations/De-registration | | Reason |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Change in carers' circumstances | 2 | Started their own business/ change in career |
| Retirement | 1 | |
| Moved out of area | 1 | Now with Swindon Long term children remain in placement |
| Approval Lapsed | 2 | Children moved out of placement |
| Transfer to adult services | 1 | Adult placement YP now 18 |
| Special Guardianship | | Orders granted |
| Total | 1 | History of concerns and following IRM recommendation |
| Total Number of Resignations and De-registrations | 8 | |

Placement and Carer Information

Carers are often approved for one child or a sibling group of two or three children. Carers are not always used to their full approval numbers because consideration has to be given to the needs of the child already in placement when considering placing another child. Good matching of children with the right carer and family reduces the risk of disruption.

On 31st March 2015 we had a total of 136 fostering placements; this comprised of short term, long term, short breaks, Parent and Child and family, friend's placements. 108 of these placements were filled with 12 remaining vacant, four of which were for relief care only. Where carers are not full this was due to a discrepancy in the "fit" between carers' availability and the needs of children already placed as 24 foster carers are approved for multiple placement.

The number of the overall children/young people in placement within the fostering service including in-house foster care, IFAs, Family Friends and Connected Persons placements (excluding short breaks) at any point between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014 was 161

121 of these children were of compulsory school age. The number of children/young people with additional needs was 11. There were 24 permanent long term placements. 61 children were in short term care including pre-adoption and pre-permanence. We had 18 children in Family,

Friends and Connected Persons' placement and in a Parent and Child placement and there were four children currently in short breaks care.

During this period there were 26 sibling groups involving 54 children. Sixteen of the sibling groups were assessed as being placed together with their siblings and this was achieved in all cases. Two sibling groups were originally placed together but were subsequently separated. The remaining eight groups were placed in individual placements.

As of 31st March 2015 we had 35 children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies. This comprised of 30 fostering households. Two placements had a sibling group of two and one a sibling group of three. We also had a parent and child placement.

Sixteen young people reached the age of 18 years during with period with six remaining in foster care under the 'Staying Put' arrangements.

The number of children requiring fostering placement has continued to increase. This significant increase is putting a lot of pressure on placement availability and this will put additional pressure on current placements.

Fostering Household Information

On 31st March 2014 we had 136 approved or temporary approved foster carers comprising of 94 fostering households of which 14 households were family and friend's carers with 11 households provided short breaks care and 5 households exclusively for short breaks. Of the 136 approved foster carers 135 are white British and one white Irish.

In the past year we received four complaints/representations from foster carers.

One regarding lack of support for a young person in placement.

One in relation to decision making.

One relating to the procedures for ending a placement and how this was communicated and managed.

One in relation to multiple issues around contact, communication, consultation, timely actions and aspects of children's services.

There has been one issue of concern regarding the registration of one foster carer whereby the fostering panel recommended de-registration; this matter went to the IRM who supported the Fostering Service decision to de-register

There were six allegations regarding foster carers two of which met the threshold to be investigated by the Local Authority Designated Officer. Both were unsubstantiated.

The remaining four were dealt with as standards of care.

Fostering Reviews

The foster carer's annual review of approval addresses all relevant aspects of the Minimum Fostering Standards and Regulations. The reviews are chaired by an experienced dedicated worker from the Family Placement team to give increased independence and scrutiny to the process. All the completed reviews are further scrutinised by the Head of Service who monitors compliance with the regulations and scrutiny of the overall report before final sign off.

The total number of foster carers' reviews completed this year is 61, 29 of which were completed with 13 months and 8 of which were first reviews. 10 took place within 16 months, 6 within 19 months and 6 within 24 months, with a remaining 2 taking 30 months. Where there was a delay these related to specific issues within the foster care household which needed to be resolved in order to offer a meaningful review eg change of household composition, medical issues and addressing issues of concern.

The appointment of a dedicated experienced social worker in the team to chair all foster carers reviews will help to achieve better outcomes in the timeliness of annual reviews.

Outcome of Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service

Ofsted began inspecting local authority children's services under a new 'single' assessment framework in November 2013. This framework includes the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after, care leavers, and a review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

West Berkshire Council was inspected by Ofsted under the new single assessment framework in March 2015. At the time of writing this report the Council were still waiting for the final judgment and completed report. Prior to the introduction of the single inspection framework the Fostering Service was last inspected, in January 2013. Ofsted rated the overall effectiveness of the service as "Good". The outcome for Children and Young People was "Outstanding" and we were rated "Good" for the Quality of the Service, Safeguarding Children and Young People, Leadership and Management. All the recommendations for this inspection have been addressed.

Recruitment

Recruitment of foster carers for 2015/16 will continue to be targeted at those able to consider taking placements of children across all age ranges and across varying timescales with specific consideration to the availability of placement choice. The focus will continue to be very much on generating web and telephone based enquiries driven by radio, press and social media based advertising activities, covering all fostering requirements including an extended campaign on the recruitment of short breaks foster carers. To facilitate the rapid and effective processing of enquirers a two stage process feeds interested parties into a monthly programme of information evenings, where the role and approval process of fostering will be explained in depth before ongoing assessment and training is scheduled in the preparation group

stage. A full listing of these information days is published on the website page westberks.gov.uk/fosternow.

The website resources (including an on-line response form) and targeted advertisements for information days are specifically aimed at including long term fostering, teenage fostering and short breaks carers. Short Breaks Care is an integral part of the overall Fostering Advertising and Promotional Plan for the period and the foreseeable future and continues to produce a regular number of enquiries.

Recruitment activity has also been used to produce enquiries for Supportive Lodgings Placement Hosts in conjunction with our service provider Step by Step. This has involved minimal extra effort and cost but has greatly added to the number of hosts available to add to the leaving care and vulnerable young person options.

Advertising continues to be targeted throughout West Berkshire with particular attention paid to the different requirements of the eastern and central/west regions of the area. Specific social media advertising through Facebook and Google + has proven very effective and together with radio and press advertising will form the basis of ongoing campaigns together with a community based events programme run by volunteers and foster carers to ensure maximum exposure of the recruitment needs. For 2015 this events programme has been extended to cover the Crafty Craft Race, Hollybrook Festival, Newbury Carnival, Culture Fest, Newbury Agricultural Show and the Englefield Steam Rally, together with pop up stalls at various Newbury and Thatcham markets and events.

Possible collaboration with other Berkshire West authorities regarding both recruitment and advertising activities is being investigated at present and should produce increased availability, penetration, effectiveness and cost control in these areas.

In the past year (April 2014 to March 2015) we received 103 fostering enquiries. 63 did not progress due to family circumstances, failure to respond, unsuitable accommodation or personal reasons. 46 information packs were sent out. During that period 14 prospective foster carers requested an initial visit and 9 took place. The remaining 4 that didn't take place either withdrew or failed to respond; 5 foster carers have been assessed and were subsequently approved, two of which are short breaks carers. We also assessed 5 connected persons who went on to full approval. One assessment ceased due to change in care plan.

Two fostering preparation groups were organised over the year and we held nine recruitment information sessions.

There is a need to recruit foster carers to meet the needs of separated children who are currently arriving from areas such as Albania, Ethiopia, Syria and Afghanistan. We engage with members of the local Black and Minority Ethnic Forum who provide mentors for foster carers who look after children who are a different ethnicity from themselves.

The Fostering Service operates an equal opportunities policy in relation to all its work with carers, children and their families. Matching procedures attempt

first to meet as many of a child's needs as possible and second to identify any unmet needs and to put in place measures to address any shortfall in provision. Carers are strongly encouraged to attend training on valuing diversity. As part of preparation for the foster carers' annual reviews we always seek the views of the foster carers, the children in placement, their parents, and foster carers' own children, regarding the service provided by the Fostering Service and ways that the Service can improve further.

Performance of the team is monitored in a variety of ways, via departmental management information (Data Zone), via team generated spreadsheets and databases which are updated and circulated on a monthly basis, through staff supervision and regular file audits, in addition to the foster carers' annual reviews mentioned above.

An innovative model of fostering that through individually tailored and structured approach to care planning, aims to bridge the gap in care resources between standard foster care and higher end services such as residential care, so as to meet the needs of a higher range of service users and prevent escalation through resources.

The Family Placement Team has been exploring an intensive fostering placement scheme, provided by an Independent Fostering Agency who recruit foster carers with specialist skills to meet the needs of the most challenging children. This involves a wrap around support network to ensure that a high level of placement support is available at all times.

Placement Factors

Our placement stability figures continue to be exceptionally good.

We are continuing to concert our efforts on keeping all young people needing placements 'in house' and living close to where their birth families live but this is becoming increasingly challenging given the number of children and young people requiring placements. Our use of independent fostering providers has continued to increase due to the complex needs for children, as well as the need to keep some young people safe out of area.

There is an increased number of children placed with 'connected persons' resulting in the completion of more assessments of specific applicants for specific named children, many of which are progressing on to a Special Guardianship Orders. Twelve Special Guardianship Orders have been granted in the past year which is an increase of 58% since 2010/2011. There are another 18 children where Special Guardianship Orders are being progressed through an assessment or being considered as the most appropriate long term option.

Parent and child placements are continuing to be considered a safe setting for both mother and baby to assess and support them in care. We now have a policy and procedures to meet the requirement of these placements. The Parent and Child Placement Policy has been designed and written to ensure that all foster carers, Family Placement Social Workers, Parents and Child's Social Workers receive the same information about the placement task they are going to undertake. The policy provides clear guidance and synopsis for

each professional / individual involved and enables guidelines for co-ordinating such placements.

West Berkshire Council is committed to improving outcomes for care leavers and to prevent them from experiencing social exclusion; it therefore assists young people aged 18+ to have the opportunity to 'Stay Put' in their foster placement thus providing them with continuity of support to improve their life chances.

Fostering Support

The Life Chances Team of workers from different disciplines (education, education welfare, educational psychology, youth work, health and early intervention) continues to have a key impact both on the recruitment of more locally based carers for formerly 'hard to place' young people. This multi-agency team focuses on improving the life chances of looked after and adopted children and has collectively been very successful in supporting both the young people and their foster carers.

The Life Chances Team focuses on the needs of the looked after child and is a very important aspect of the fostering services support strategy. All carers have direct access to members of this team.

We have a home study handbook for foster carers who are in the assessment stage of the process.

We are introducing induction training for newly approved foster carers and we run workshops for carers to complete their TSD standards training.

We have introduced 'Fostering Changes' to equip foster carers in their care of more challenging children/YP.

We have re-launched the COT (Carers of Tomorrow) group for foster carers' own children.

We have regular meetings with the West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association and use this as a forum for consultation to develop services.

Foster carers are involved with the preparation training and where possible we link new carers at an early stage with more experienced foster carers.

The Family Placement Team continues to support and facilitate carers' relationships and networking links through hosting social evenings, such as the foster carers' award ceremony and the foster carers' Christmas party, a thank-you lunch during fostering fortnight and a bi-annual foster carers' celebration evening. The service also recognises the important role that foster carers' own children play in ensuring the stability of placements and positive outcomes for looked after children.

Panel continues to seek and receive feedback from panel users, both carers and staff, on the panel process and how it is experienced by users, together with suggestions for improvement.

Summary/Future Challenges

The Department of Education statistical figures for Looked After Children in England year ending 31st March 2014 indicates that the number of looked after children continues to rise. There were 68,840 looked after children, an increase of 1% compared to 31 March 2013 and an increase of 7% compared to 31 March 2010.

These numbers have increased steadily over the past 5 years, with 30,430 children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2014, an increase of 5% from 2013 and an increase of 8% from 2010.

Over a third of looked after children are aged between 10 and 15 years old, which made up 37% in 31 March 2014. This trend has continued and we have seen a significant increase in the number of requests for placements for older children.

Consequently the rise in looked after children is leading to more children in foster care which accounts for three quarters of the looked after population so the number of children in foster care has continued to rise. Of children looked after at 31 March 2014, 51,340 were cared for in a foster placement. This represents an increase of 9% since 2010, a larger increase than the rise in overall numbers of looked after children.

The Fostering Service has, in line with the government's finding, had an increase in the number of children requiring foster care and an increase in the number of children needing long term or permanent placements.

The team has continued to work hard to find the most appropriate placement for those children and young people who are unable to remain in their family. We continue to work hard to keep young people in local, in-house foster placements thereby enabling them to maintain links with their families and communities.

The number of children requiring fostering placement has continued to rise. This significant increase puts a lot of pressure on placement availability and this puts additional pressure on current placements. In order to match the needs of children it has been necessary to place some with Independent Fostering Agencies.

It is predicted that external placements will continue to be required from time to time in the forthcoming year. In these instances we will continue to use placements within the South East Regional contact involving eleven local authorities, including West Berkshire, who have commissioned a contractual framework with preferred providers. This arrangement can help to reduce the cost of some independent agency charges and ensure that quality standards are maintained.

Implementing the 'Staying Put' policy has been a challenge, particularly in an arrangement where the young person has a disability. We have been working with our partner agencies to address this issue and amendments will be made to the policy so that it is clear how these arrangements work.

Overall the work of the Family Placement Team has increased significantly and brought with it the challenge of meeting the individual demands of the various timescales in different parts of the service. In addition to recruitment and supporting foster carers, the team also assesses complete connected persons assessments of potential permanent family members as foster carers, as well as family finding for long term fostering, short break care, private fostering and post adoption and SGO support.

Fostering is a challenging role and requires skills and dedication. We want to encourage more people to become foster carers and make sure that they have the support and skills to meet the varied and complex needs of looked after children. The recruitment of foster carers and increasing the number of placement for older children and mother and baby placements is a key challenge facing the service. Improving the quality of foster carers is also a key challenge for the team.

The team also provides a Duty Service each day to search for placements and respond to enquiries or the needs of foster carers when their supervising social worker is unavailable. Social Workers in the team provide regular training for foster carers both pre and post approval.

The fostering panel continues to have a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster carers for children. The panel also has responsibility for making recommendations about approval and terms of approval and assessing the continuing ability of foster carers and their households to meet the complex needs of children. The Fostering Service has an efficient and effective fostering panel that ensures that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of Looked After Children.

June Kemp
Family Placement Team Manager
Fostering Panel Adviser

March 2015

WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2015 – 2016

Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

The West Berkshire Fostering Service is run in accordance with the National Minimum Standards which are underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and 2011 and the National Care Standards Act 2000. Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services – Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review sets out the wider context for local authorities as providers and commissioners of fostering services. It also strives to follow the best practice guidance outlined in the UK National Standards for Foster Care and Code of Practice (1999).

The Fostering Service exists to provide high quality locally based substitute family care, on either a short or long term basis; to meet the needs of looked after children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents. The service also supports some children within their families of origin by providing regular periods of family-based short breaks care.

The service is committed to ensuring that the foster care services provided for children and young people and their families value diversity and promote equality. Each child and their family will have access to services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. The service seeks to ensure that foster carers provide care that respects and preserves each child's unique history and enhances the child's confidence and feelings of self worth. We aim to achieve this through promoting a positive identity, recognising potential and valuing diversity through individual care.

The service aims to provide (either directly or via work with partner agencies) services which meet the individual needs of Looked After Children, as identified through the assessment, care planning, pathway planning and reviewing processes. This includes the identification and provision of necessary additional services and support eg education, health, psychotherapeutic and youth work services. The service aims to maximise young people's life chances by providing them with positive childhood experiences and the opportunity to reach their full potential as they move towards adulthood. This will help to create a positive self view and build emotional resilience. This work further supported by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

West Berkshire Council is committed to improving outcomes for care leavers and to prevent them from experiencing social exclusion, it has therefore developed a policy to ensure that young people 18+ can have the opportunity to 'Stay Put' in their foster placement thus providing them with continuity of support to improve their life chances and successful move to independence. This will be achieved through preparation for,

and support into, adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing.

Service demand includes the placements of adults with their children, as we recognise the importance of Parent and Child foster care to provide a safe and friendly environment, which will enable the parent to be supervised and supported with their baby/infant.

The service is committed to consulting with children, young people, their parents, foster carers and carers' birth children, and to ensuring that the views with others with an important relationship to the child are gathered and taken into account in both individual care planning and in service development. Wherever possible people within the child or young person's network of family and friends are assessed and supported in the same way as stranger foster carers.

The service regards foster carers as members of the professional care team. It is committed to providing foster carers with the support and training necessary to enable them to offer high quality care to all children and young people who are in receipt of family placement services. The service endorses the Foster Carers' Charter putting foster carers at the heart of arrangements for looked after children.

The Family Placement Team

The Fostering Service is provided by the Family Placement Team of West Berkshire District Council.

Other services provided by the Family Placement Team are:

- Post-adoption support services
- Special Guardianship services
- Private fostering services
- Identification and oversight of placements with Independent Fostering Providers

The vision of the team is:

That West Berkshire will be regarded as having one of the best Family Placement Teams in the country, offering a range of high quality and innovative services that provide safe and stable placements for children and young people. This will be achieved by a skilled, dedicated and motivated team of staff and carers working together, in partnership with a range of service providers, to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. The Family Placement Team will be a valuable source of specialist knowledge within Children's Services. It will continually evaluate effectiveness and involve users and carers in planning and development to make sure the highest standards are maintained.

The core values of the team are:

- The needs of the children and young people are always paramount
- Promoting equality and valuing diversity underpins all our practice
- Work is undertaken to achieve the highest professional standards
- To work in partnership with children, birth families and other professionals involved with the care of the children

Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service currently offers:

Planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups of all ages, including specialist care for disabled children, across the full range of short and long term placements, and relief care when necessary for established placements.

Planned and emergency family and friends foster care for individual children and siblings of all ages across the full range of long and short term placements. Family and Friends care receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

Family based day and overnight short breaks care for children and young people and their families including specialist care to meet the needs of disabled children.

Parent and Child Placements. The fostering Service have a Parent and Child Placement Policy which has been designed and written to ensure that all foster carers, Family Placement Social Workers, Parents and Child's Social Workers receive the same information about the placement task they are going to undertake. The policy also provides clear guidance and synopsis for each professional / individual involved and enable guidelines for co-ordinating such placements.

The Fostering Service supports this by providing:

Close links with the Department's children and families' teams to ensure integrated planning and provision of services for individual service users and effective service development work.

The Fostering Service is managed and provided by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an effective and efficient service.

The team are appropriately trained and are experienced social works and all foster carers' with a named supervising social worker. These social workers provide ongoing supervision, support, information and advice to foster carers. They also promote foster carers' training and professional development needs. We have a team of family support workers who's role is to provide placement support while working alongside qualified social workers.

A proactive recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers that seeks to maximise the number and range of foster carers available locally and thus ensure that there is appropriate local placement choice wherever possible so that children are able to remain close to their home areas.

We have an effectively administered payments scheme that covers the financial costs of caring for children and young people.

A training programme for all new and existing foster carers, including the NVQ social care programme, an on-line diploma programme for experienced foster carers and an on-line short course programme designed to enable foster carers to meet the relevant TSD standards for all foster carers.

The assessments of prospective foster carers that are in line with national standards, including preparatory training in groups and individual assessments of prospective foster carers and their households.

A properly constituted fostering panel with an independent chairperson, administered in line with regulatory requirements. This panel, which meets at least monthly, considers and makes recommendations to the agency decision maker about:

- the approval of all new fostering applicants including family and friends foster care and the approval of connected people;
- first reviews after approval;
- requests for changes to the approval status of existing foster carers;
- matches of children and foster carers for long term fostering placements;
- allegations, complaints and issues of serious concern relating to foster carers;
- Panel also offers advice in relation to safeguarding arrangements to support approved foster carers;
- Panel also considers the acceptance of private fostering arrangements.

Management and Staffing Structure – 2015

The Manager of the Fostering Service is the Family Placement Team Manager, June Kemp, who reports to the Children's Services Manager, Sandra Dopson.

The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Children and Young People's Services, Catherine Parry.

All Social Workers within the Family Placement Team hold a professional social work qualification ie CQSW, CSS, Dip Sw, Social work degree and are registered by the HCPC. In addition to this they have a good understanding of fostering issues and regularly attend additional training events to maintain and extend their knowledge base.

The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

| | |
|----------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Team Manager |
| 1 | Assistant Team Manager |
| 1 | Specialist Post-adoption support social worker |
| 7.82 FTE | Family Placement Social Workers |
| 4.6 FTE | Family Support Workers |
| 1 | Publicity and Recruitment Worker |
| 3.25 FTE | Support Services Staff |

Staffing Position as at March 2015

| Position | Name | FT/PT |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Team Manager | June Kemp | FT |
| Assistant Team Manager | Keith Langley | FT |
| Post-adoption Support Social Worker | Ananada Bodenstein | FT |
| Senior Social Worker | Andreea Pop | FT |
| Social Workers | Peter Field | FT |
| Agency soon to be permanent | Tina Williams | FT |
| | Alex Wickens | FT |
| | Susan Tarrant | FT |
| | Selina Beety | PT |
| | - | PT |
| Agency | Bernadette Heron | PT |
| Agency | Larissa Barrie | PT |
| Family Placement Support Workers | Sandra Bailey | PT |
| Currently with the leaving care team | Andy Blackwood | FT |
| | Ann Athawes | FT |
| | Vera Lizunova | PT |
| Publicity and Recruitment Worker | John North | FT |
| Senior Support Services Officer | Helen Benn | PT |
| Support Services Officers | Andrea Martin | PT |
| | Alexandra Steward | PT |
| Support Services Assistant | Karen Hugo | PT |
| | Linda Burry | PT |

Complaints

All foster carers and looked after children and young people and their parents are encouraged to make effective representations about any aspect of the fostering service. They are provided with written information about complaint procedures, including contact details for the Complaints and Public Information Manager for Children and Young People's Services. All complaints and their outcomes are monitored by both the Complaints Manager and the Family Placement Team Manager.

A 'Looked After' children's pack including the Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is given to all children and young people at the start of their placement and foster carers also have copies. This includes contact details for the Complaints

Manager, the Rights for You service and Ofsted. The West Berkshire Independent Visitor's Scheme is available to all looked after children and young people at their own or their social worker's request.

Evaluation

Ofsted began inspecting local authority children's services under a new 'single' assessment framework in November 2013. This framework includes the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after, care leavers, and a review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

West Berkshire Council was inspected by Ofsted under the new single assessment framework in March 2015. At the time of writing this report the Council were still waiting for the final judgment and completed report.

The most recent inspection, in January 2013, rated the overall effectiveness of the service as "Good". The outcome for Children and Young People was "Outstanding" and we were rated "Good" for the Quality of the Service, Safeguarding Children and Young People, Leadership and Management.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention strategy designed to maximise capacity, retain foster carers, meet current identified needs, plan for future projected requirements and place children and young people locally wherever possible. This strategy is reviewed annually.

The Fostering Service proposes to recruit additional foster carers for an intensive fostering placement scheme. This will be based on a '3 tier' foster carer's model. This will involve intensively trained foster carers, who would be retained by the Council, together with a wrap around support network to ensure that a high level of placement support is available at all times. Recruiting more foster carers with these specialist skills will meet the needs of the most challenging children will help to place more children locally and enable them to stay in contact with their family and friends.

There is a Publicity and Recruitment Worker within the team who has specific responsibility for raising local awareness of the on-going need for foster carers and supported accommodation (lodgings) carers and developing and implementing a targeted recruitment strategy. In particular this focuses on the placement of children and young people aged 11 years and over for whom there is currently a shortage of short and long term placements.

Additionally, in line with the Department's broader strategy of maintaining children and young people within their birth family networks whenever possible, the fostering service works to promote and enable the use of families and friends carers wherever appropriate. To achieve this the fostering service takes into account the pre-existing relationships inherent in family and friends fostering arrangements and recognises the particular contribution that family and friends foster carers can make. These factors

are taken into account in the assessment process whilst ensuring adherence to the fostering minimum standards and that care planning, placement and review regulations are maintained.

Approval of Foster Carers

The approval process for foster carers meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2011. The Assessment and approval of foster carers; Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulation Volume 4: Fostering Services was introduced in July 2013. This introduced a new two part process for assessing a person's suitability to foster.

When a person applies to foster, the fostering service should assess their suitability in accordance with Regulation 26. The information required in stage one of the assessment process must be sought as soon as possible, the decision about whether the applicant has successfully completed stage one must be made within 10 working days of all the information required in stage one being received. If it is decided to undertake stage two of the assessment, Regulation 26(2) requires the fostering service to obtain information about the applicant as set out in Part 2 of Schedule 3.

Assessments of foster carers follow the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Prospective Foster Carers format. The assessment and approval process involves and considers all members of the applicant's household plus significant others (eg birth children living elsewhere) as appropriate.

A range of employment, health and personal references are obtained and verified regarding the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) and other government and local authority checks are made. Personal references are obtained and referees are interviewed.

A report is prepared by the assessing Social Worker, with recommendations on the applicant's suitability to be a foster carer(s) and whether s/he should be approved for named children only, or more generally for between one and three children or four if siblings within a particular age range, sex, area of need etc having regard to her/his assessed abilities, experience and the accommodation available.

Applicants are provided with a copy of the non-confidential sections (ie everything except the references) of the assessment reports before they are submitted to the Fostering Panel and have the opportunity to make written comments if they wish to do so. The Panel provides information leaflets for new applicants and existing carers whose approval is being considered by Panel, including details of panel membership and processes.

The West Berkshire Fostering Panel considers every application that is presented to it. All applicant(s) are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel meeting that considers their application, and are informed of the Panel's recommendation and Head of Service's decision both verbally and in writing. A copy of the relevant extract from the Panel minutes is sent to all applicants and carers. A Foster Care Agreement is drawn up and signed with all foster carers both at initial approval and following any changes to their approval.

Training of Foster Carers

The Department arranges and provides training for all foster carers in order to promote the development of foster carers' skills and knowledge, to help them meet the needs of the children and young people placed in their care.

A training programme for foster carers is provided to cover both the basic requirements of new carers, pre- and post-approval, and further training to develop and extend the skills of experienced foster carers, and to address their specific needs relevant to certain situations. This training programme is reviewed annually and foster carers are asked, via contact with their supervising social workers and via the review process, to identify training which they would like the agency to incorporate into its annual programme. There are financial incentives in order to encourage attendance. Wherever possible, training is provided for staff and foster carers together so that learning and understanding is mutually enhanced. Individual training needs are met as far as is practicable within existing budgets. Attendance on this training programme is monitored by supervising social workers via the review process.

Discussion of a foster carer's future training needs forms a key part of the foster carer annual review. Where there are two adults in one household applying or approved as joint carers, both must successfully complete all mandatory training. There is a clear expectation that foster carers will regularly attend training sessions.

We have recently introduced Fostering Changes which is a twelve week course that gives foster carers strategies and tools to manage challenging behaviours and focused on positive reinforcement.

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care are being implemented by the service. We do, however, need to be more robust in ensuring that foster carers meet this requirement. The Standards are accompanied by a Guide for Foster Carers, a Workbook and Guidance for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers. The fostering team is implementing the standards and has developed a tool for assessing competency and planning appropriate training for carers in conjunction with an independent contractor.

Support for Foster Carers

Supervision and support for individual foster carers is provided by the allocated Family Placement Team supervising social worker, who visits the foster carer(s) at regular intervals, and additionally when required (visits or telephones) at other times. Family Placement Team staff liaises closely with placing social workers and their managers. A Foster Placement Agreement is drawn up with all relevant parties at the start of every placement this also includes delegated authority. A safer caring and risk management agreement is also made in relation to all placements.

A regular newsletter is produced by foster carers and circulated by the Publicity and Recruitment Worker. A telephone support service for all approved foster carers and adopters is provided by members of the team outside of office hours in addition to the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team. Foster carers are also supported by the work of

the placing social workers and their managers; and the members of the multi agency Life Chances Team for Looked After Children.

Financial support is provided by the Department through the Fostering Placement Allowance Scheme, details of which are provided separately. All foster carers receive payment at rates that are one and a half times the Fostering Network recommended minimum. Financial assistance for 'child sitting' is provided to enable foster carers to attend training and have occasional evenings out.

All foster carers are automatically enrolled as members of Fostering Network, membership fees being paid by the Department. West Berkshire also actively supports and works in partnership with the local West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association.

Foster carers have access to an out of office hours telephone support service operated by the Family Placement Team, in addition to the services of the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team.

There is support and guidance from Members of the Life Chances Team for Looked After Children and Young People. This is a multi agency team which includes staff whose job is either working full time with Looked After Children or where part of their role is allocated to this work. Membership includes a nurse, teachers, a youth worker, education welfare, an educational psychologist, YOT, CAMHS, Family Resource Service, the Family Placement Team, Connexions, Early Years and the locality teams.

The Department supports 'back up' care to assist carers attending training and meetings.

There is support from and close liaison with the West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association.

Reviewing of Foster Carers

All approved foster carers have annual reviews of their performance, training needs, terms of approval and continued registration of their approval as foster carers and their households.

Reviews of a foster carer's approval take place within the first six months of approval and annually thereafter, unless for some reason it is considered appropriate to hold an earlier review. The supervising social worker visits the carer in preparation for the review, and the views of placing social workers, placed children and their families and the LAC Reviewing Officer are also sought. Health and safety checks are repeated annually, and DBS and medical checks are repeated every three years in accordance with regulatory requirements. All reviews are attended by the foster carer(s) and the supervising social worker, and are chaired by a dedicated experienced social worker from the Family Placement Team.

The completed review report is signed by the supervising social worker and the review chair before being passed to the Head of Service who considers the report and decides whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable. The

carers are notified in writing of this decision which is attached to the review report and forwarded to the carers to sign and add their comments.

The first review after approval is always considered by the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews may be referred to the Fostering Panel at the discretion of the Family Placement Team Manager and as directed by the regulations.

If the Fostering Service is no longer satisfied that a foster carer and/or the fostering household continue to be suitable for fostering the issue is referred for consideration by the Fostering Panel. Following a recommendation by the Fostering Panel to terminate approval, written notice is given to the foster carer(s) that termination of approval is proposed. The foster carer(s) are invited to make representations to the Panel at a subsequent meeting, following which the decision maker, taking into account any recommendation made by the Fostering Panel, makes a decision and written notice is given to the foster carer(s).

Prospective foster carers who are not being recommended for approval and foster carers whose approval is being recommended for termination or variation are able to either make representation to the fostering agency or the Independent Review Mechanism.

Documentation

The Fostering Service regularly reviews the Fostering Procedures Manual for Staff and the Foster Carers Handbook to take account of updates in practice issues and legislative changes where appropriate. Both meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2011, accurately reflect the statement of purpose and are in line with current expectations of good practice.

The statement of purpose will be made available to all staff working for the Fostering Service; a copy will be given to all approved and prospective foster carers and it will be available upon request to all parents of children and young people looked after by the Fostering Service.

Members are regularly apprised of performance via annual reports at the Corporate Parent Panel where membership includes two foster carers.

Details of the Registration Authority

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel 0300 123 1231

June Kemp
Family Placement Team Manager
April 2015

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