

Title of Report:	Annual Report of the West Berkshire Fostering Service and the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose
Report to be considered by:	Executive
Date of Meeting:	21 July 2011
Forward Plan Ref:	EX2312

Purpose of Report: Statutory requirement to annually review the Fostering Statement of Purpose and to report on the work of the Fostering Service.

Recommended Action: To agree the Statement of Purpose and note the work of the fostering service in it's annual report.

Reason for decision to be taken: To comply with the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Fostering Services 2002. The department has a statutory responsibility to report on the work of the Fostering service to Elected Members on an annual basis and also to agree an annual Statement of Purpose for the service

Other options considered: None

Key background documentation: None

<p>The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priority:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPP2 – Raise levels of educational achievement – improving school performance levels</p> <p>The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Themes:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT7 - Safer and Stronger Communities</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT8 - A Healthier Life</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT10 - Promoting Independence</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT11 - Protecting Vulnerable People</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT12 - Including Everyone</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CPT14 - Effective People</p> <p>The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:</p>

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Irene Neill – 0118 9712671
E-mail Address:	ineill@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	18 June 2011

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Sandra Dopson
Job Title:	Service Manager
Tel. No.:	01635 503155
E-mail Address:	sdopson@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:	Ensuring that the Council has access to a high quality fostering service is essential to meet the need, of very vulnerable children locally; without this, placement costs would rise significantly.
Equalities Impact Assessment:	The Fostering Service strives to ensure that the very varied needs of looked after children are appropriately met.

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council		<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position		<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months		<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>

Executive Summary and Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Fostering Service is subject to external regulation, and it is required to report on its activities to the Council's Executive on a regular basis. There are approximately 123 Children and Young People in care, the majority of whom are in foster care. It was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2008 and was rated as Outstanding. The service is due another inspection in the near future.
- 1.2 This paper introduces the Fostering Annual Report, Appendix A and the Foster Care Service Statement of Purpose, Appendix B.

2. Foster Care

- 2.1 In March 2011 there were 62 approved fostering households able to provide up to 108 placements, this includes short and long term placements, short breaks care, and placements with relatives. The number of placements that the fostering service is managing has increased over the past year.
- 2.2 Recruitment of foster carers continues to be a priority with active advertising in the local media. Particular focus has been on recruiting foster carers for teenagers and disabled children.
- 2.3 Long term stability remains high despite a continuing high demand for placements which in turn, leads to better outcomes for the children and young people in care. All foster carers have access to a comprehensive training programme and are actively supported by the Family Placement Team and the Life Chances Team.
- 2.4 The numbers of children placed with Independent Fostering Providers is 9% which compares favourably with other local authorities. There is a concerted effort to Keep all young people needing placements 'in house' and living close to their birth families.
- 2.5 The West Berkshire Foster Care Association (WBFCA) meets monthly and is active in organising events, including an evening for new foster carers, coffee mornings, involvement in recruitment events and training. Representatives meet with senior officers on a bi monthly basis to discuss any issues and to work together to develop services and support for foster carers. The Association is represented by two foster carers sitting on the West Berkshire Corporate Parenting Panel.
- 2.6 The COT group (carers of tomorrow) is an established well attended group. This is facilitated by staff from the Family Placement Team offering support to the children of foster carers.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Overall the fostering service is performing well with significant efforts being made to maintain placement stability recognising the positive outcomes that stability offers. All placements benefit greatly from the support of the Family Placement Team, Life Chances Team and the Foster Care Association.

Appendices

Appendix A – Fostering Service Annual Report
Appendix B – Fostering Service Statement of Purpose
Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: Foster Panel, West Berkshire Foster Care Association
Officers Consulted: Children’s Services Management Team
Margaret Goldie, Corporate Director, Children and Young People
Trade Union: Not consulted