

WEST BERKSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

Annual Report – April 2010 to March 2011

Introduction

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.

Panel Membership

Panel membership this year has been as follows:

Name	Role	Start date	Resignation Date
Ros Whittaker	Independent Panel Chair	Oct 2008	Continuing
Peter Argyle	Elected Councillor Rep	Sept 2003	Continuing
Keith Langley	Fostering Service Rep	Sept 2008	Continuing
Clare Minchin	Children and Families (inc Disabled Children) Rep	May 2003	Continuing
Dilean Mkwanzani	Children and Families Rep	June 2010	Nov 2010
Sarah Holderness	Children and Families Rep	Feb 2011	Continuing
Kate Pike	Education Service Rep	Jan 2009	Continuing
Chris Cutler	Foster Carer (Independent)	Sept 2008	Continuing
Waheeda Soomro	Community and Diversity Rep (Independent)	Oct 2009	Continuing
June Kemp	Panel Adviser	Oct 2009	Continuing
Helen Benn	Panel Administrator	Feb 2003	Continuing

The Panel membership continues to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2002. Changes to panel procedures are currently in progress to meet the new Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2011.

A new social work representative joined the panel in February 2011. We have a panel member who is able to provide ethnicity and diversity expertise. A new panel adviser is now in post who has significant experience of fostering. Recruitment to the panel is ongoing with an emphasis on recruiting a care leaver/independent member.

The new guidance and regulations allow panel members to remain on the panel with no maximum or minimum tenure. This will enable those panel members who choose to remain on the panel the opportunity to do so. Fostering panels no longer need to have fixed membership. Panel members will be drawn from a 'central list' of people with the qualifications and experience to be a panel member.

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 members attended one business meeting this year and panel members generally attend one training session once a year. Panel members also have the opportunity to attend training lunchtime seminars or conferences run by the department.

PANEL BUSINESS

Summary of Panel Recommendations (April 10 to March 11)

Number of Panel Meetings	11	
	Cases heard	Comments
New approvals		
Long term (non kinship)	3	
Short term	6	
Short Breaks	3	
Family & Friends	2	
Total	14	
First Reviews	6	
Changes of Approval	10	
Issues of Concern/CP	2	
Updates	0	
Private Fostering arrangements	2	
LT Match (non kinship)	2	
Supported Lodgings	0	
Relief carers	2	
Interim Kinship Care	2	
Kinship approval	1	
Safeguarding and support	2	
Resignations	12	
Applicants not approved	1	
Total number of items considered	56	

Summary of Foster Carer Resignations and De-registrations (April 10 to March 11)

Number of Resignations		12	
Placements became permanent		1	Adoption Order/Special Guardianship Order / Residence Order granted
Specific placement ended		4	Young people reached 18
Kinship care		4	Children to return to parents
Change in carers' circumstances		3	Including where couples split up but one continued fostering
Number of De-registrations		0	
Total		12	

WEST BERKSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE DATA

West Berkshire Approved Carers (as at 31 March 2011)

Total of Approved Fostering Households	62	
<i>(NB: several households approved for more than one group)</i>		
For specific long term placements (non kinship) number of placements	16	
For short term placements (number of placements)	64	
For short breaks care	12	
For specific relatives or friends (number of placements)	12	
Supported Lodgings	4	
Total Placements	108	
Net placement difference March 2010 to March 2011		+15

Out of the short term placements 5 are able to offer short breaks care and 7 relief care placements.

Placements with West Berkshire Carers (as at 31 March 2011)

Total number of placements managed by the Fostering Service	Available	In use
Number of long term placements (non kinship)	16	16
Number of short term placements	64	46
Number of family and friends placements	12	12
Number of supported lodgings placements	4	3
Number of short breaks placements	12	12
Total of full time placements	108	99

Additional Information

- Carers are often approved for one or a sibling group of two or three children. We currently have 4 carers who are in this situation who are unable to take a second or third placement. Where carers are not full this is usually due to discrepancy in the “fit” between carers’ availability and the needs of children already placed. We currently have 4 carers who are unable to take a second placement due to the complex needs of the child who is currently in placement. We have two carers available who provide relief/respice/emergency placements used on a regular basis to provide respice for carers who have very challenging placements. We also have four carers who are currently on hold due to their family circumstances or health issues.
- 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. Although we will continue to recruit we may need to place children with Independent Fostering Agencies to meet the demand for placements in the future if this trend continues.
- At the time of writing this report there are no foster carers with temporary variations to their terms of approval. Four carers who needed variations over the past year have all been taken to panel for consideration of a change to their terms of approval.
- Two young people have remained living in their foster placement post 18 but are no longer looked after children. The Leaving Care team has a clear procedure for supporting young people who reach the age of 18, including support for university education.
- During the past year the Fostering Service has received two complaints one of which was a very complex complaint involving a private foster carer. One was satisfactorily resolved. The private foster carer has not requested further consideration of their complaint. The Fostering Service also received two representations which were satisfactorily resolved.
- There have been 4 child protection investigations of which two were in relation to Private Fostering arrangements. There has also been one issue of concern. All of these were satisfactorily concluded, 2 of which were reported to Foster Panel.

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 the off-line family placement assistant team manager to give increased independence and scrutiny to the process. All the completed reviews are further scrutinised by the team manager who monitors compliance with the regulations via both monthly spreadsheets and scrutiny of the overall report before final sign off.

43 of 62 reviews have been carried out within 13 months of the previous review. Where there have been delays these relate to specific issues within the foster care household which needed to be resolved in order to offer a meaningful review e.g. change of household composition, medical issues and section 47 investigation.

Outcome of OFSTED inspection of the Fostering Service

There has been no inspection of the Fostering Service in the 2010/2011 year. The previous annual inspection of the Fostering Service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection was conducted in March 2008. They found that overall the Fostering Service continues to provide excellent outcomes for children and young people. West Berkshire was assessed as having a fostering service with the overall quality rating of **outstanding**. As a result the fostering service has been granted permission to use the “outstanding” logo on it’s literature, advertising etc.

The inspection report is available upon request from the Family Placement Team. It is also available on the OFSTED website.

WEST BERKSHIRE CHILDREN’S SERVICES’ DATA

Number of Children Looked After by West Berkshire (as at 31 March 2011)

Total number of Looked after Children	123	
Total number of Looked After Children placed with West Berkshire carers	78	This does not include short breaks, supported lodgings, adult placements or children placed from another local authority using our placements.
Males	49	
Females	29	
Percentage aged 9 and over	63%	
Percentage from black and minority ethnic groups	20.5%	
Number in West Berkshire placements	78	
Number placed with independent fostering agency carers	13	Two of these are young people are UASC, one has a disability.
Number placed with other local authority carers	0	
Number in fostering placements	91	

Summary of relevant National Indicators data for March 2011

- Percentage of looked after children aged under 16 years and in care for 2.5 years or more who have been in their current placement for at least 2 years is 78.3% (NI 63).
- Percentage of looked after children with 3 or more placement moves in the last year 5.7%. (NI 62).
- Percentage of children adopted (and Special Guardianship Orders) from the Authority in the last year is 6.1% (PAF C23).

Short Breaks Care

The authority has 7 carers approved specifically for short breaks care to children with disabilities as well as 5 foster carers who offer short breaks care in addition to foster care.

Recruitment

Short Breaks Care - As part of the Aiming High programme we have stepped up our publicity and advertising activity to include specific Short Breaks radio advertisements across West Berkshire. The revamped web site resources (including an on line response form) and targeted newspaper advertisements for information events are specifically aimed at Short Breaks Carers. Short Breaks Care is an integral part of the overall Fostering Advertising and Promotional plan for the coming period and the foreseeable future. As a result of the recent campaign we have approved 3 short break carers. 3 carers are in the process of assessment and 2 are waiting to attend a fostering panel.

Recruitment of foster carers has this year been 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 use of an online web enquiry form together with targeted advertising promotions has proven highly successful in producing a regular level of enquiries for filtering into the preparation and assessment training processes.

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 radio and press advertising for the eastern region have been run with Reading based resources, this campaign ran until the end of March 2011.

A Private Fostering campaign on radio was also running throughout Jan 2010 together with a micro-site web resource. For the western/central region a radio campaign for foster carer recruitment took place at the beginning of the year and this continued until the end of March 2011. There was also advertising

through the year for fostering recruitment at Newbury Vue cinema across all screens.

For Fostering Fortnight an Ad-Van mobile advertising campaign took place which ran across the area. Additional recruitment activity with the West Berkshire Foster Carers Association includes the Crafty Craft Race in May, The Calcot Fair in June and the Royal County of Berkshire Show in September. Appearances at school summer fetes also took place. In the past year, (April 2010 to March 2011), 124 fostering enquiries were received with 122 information packs sent out. During that period 36 prospective foster carers requested an initial visit and 32 took place. 10 carers went on to complete the fostering preparation group.

3 fostering preparation groups were organised over the year, all arranged for weekends and evenings for the convenience of prospective foster carers. Due to low numbers 1 group was cancelled. We approved 7 new fostering households over the past year and agreed placement support for 2 carers.

The average time taken for a fostering assessment, from formal application to approval following consideration by Fostering Panel is approximately 5 months which compares favourably nationally. 1 assessment where there were issues to resolve took 14 months.

Currently there are no foster carers from ethnic background other than white European. There is a need to recruit foster carers to meet the needs of separated children who are currently arriving from areas such as 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 and there has also been specific training for male carers. 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 (The Red Book), via team generated spreadsheets updated and circulated on a monthly basis, through staff supervision and regular file audits, in addition to the foster carer annual reviews mentioned above.

Placement Factors

The number of placements that the Fostering Service is managing has increased over the last year.

Our placement stability figures continue to be exceptionally good.

There have been 6 Adoption Orders, 2 Special Guardianship Orders made during the last year in relation to children looked after.

Our use of independent fostering providers for placements has remained consistent, and the concerted effort to keep all young people needing placements 'in house' and living close to where their birth families are from has continued to be successful.

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 and in the decreasing use of Independent Fostering Provider placements. 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 focus 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.

Panel continue 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.

The general feedback is good in relation to the quality of information provided about panel; applicants feeling welcomed and the extent to which they felt important issues are considered. Applicants are also invited to make positive suggestions on how fostering applications are processed or how the panel process can be improved. Any concerns raised in the feedback are addressed individually with the applicant.

Conclusion

This has been another busy year for the Family Placement Team in terms of placements. There has been an increase in the number of children requiring foster care and a significant increase in the number of children needing long term placements as well as referral for family finding for adoption. The team has worked hard to keep young people in local, in-house placements thereby enabling them to maintain the links with their families and communities.

Panel has been busy and has dealt with a number of fairly complex cases, particularly in the area of kinship/family and friends foster care as well as private fostering matters, safeguarding and support.

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 decisions about approval and terms of approval and assessing the continuing ability of foster carers and their household 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

31 March 2011