

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Review of Fostering Services</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Philip Segurola Interim Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Cllr Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People &amp; Learning</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>All</b>

**CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:**

The Single Inspection Framework Inspection undertaken by Ofsted in June 2017 stated: 'many carers feel poorly supported, and the fostering service is not compliant with all regulations.' And recommended that we: "Ensure that the fostering service appropriately supports foster carers and that the work of the service meets all relevant regulations"

The council's Children's improvement Plan, published in November 2017, states that we will

- 1) Ensure that the fostering service meets all nation minimum standards (3.10)
- 2) Develop a fostering service action plan to deliver a good quality service that values foster carers (3.10)
- 3) Engage in house foster carers to monitor progress on the fostering service improvement action plan (3.10)
- 4) Conduct an annual foster carer survey as part of the quality assurance framework (3.10)

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Not applicable as this report is for information only

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Not applicable as this report is for information only

**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1** The following report serves to update Panel on the progress being made to improve the Local Authority Fostering Service. The panel are requested to note the report.

### **3. REVIEW OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE**

#### **3.1 Overview**

- In February 2017, the Local Authority had a whistle blowing complaint on the quality of supervision of foster carers, conduct of foster carers and social workers. An Independent Consultant was appointed to undertake a Review of the Fostering Service in March 2017. The Terms of Reference included face to face consultation, telephone and email exchanges with Foster Carers. Also included was an audit of 40 cases selected by the Safeguarding Service including all cases where there have been referrals to the LADO Service. The audit was undertaken by wide range of managers from Children Services. An Action Plan was developed from the recommendations.
- In June 2017 we had the Ofsted Inspection (SIF). In March 2018, Achieving For Children was commissioned to Review progress of the service and its report is attached to this overview. The findings acknowledged progress since the initial review in 2017. The Service updated its initial Action Plan which is also attached to this report.
- The main recommendation from the Fostering Review and Ofsted was the need to improve our offer of support to foster carers and prioritising our statutory duties. At the end of 2017, we reviewed our annual training module for foster carers with an improved offer for 2018. In September 2017, we held a Consultation Session with our Connected Carers which led to the introduction of a quarterly Support Group run by Fostering Managers. From January 2018, our policy is to allocate Supervising Social Workers to all Connected Carers who are undergoing assessments. This approach has promoted early stability of placements, provided early support to Connected Carers and safeguarded children.
- As at 29<sup>th</sup> June 2018, Croydon has 229 fostering households with 326 children placed in-house. There is an increased need for foster placement in Croydon as a high proportion of our Looked After Children are placed in foster care. Croydon has one of the largest fostering households in the country with a high retention rate (95%) and continues to be attractive to foster carers. In the future we would like to attract families for local children and young people with complex needs, Including behavioral needs and those at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation and gang involvement. We would also like to be able to keep more siblings together and provide for assessment of adult parents and babies.
- The Service undertook a confidential online survey of foster carers and 69% of them said the service they receive is either 'Good' or 'Very Good'. In addition, foster carers requested a review of the Council's Staying Put offer to foster carers. The review have been completed and is awaiting approval of Corporate Parenting Panel.
- In response to demand from foster carers and social workers across the service, we have reviewed the Local Authority Policy on Savings for all Looked After Children. The plan is for the new policy to become live by 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018.
- In 2017, we introduced a monthly rota of managers attending Croydon Foster Carers Association (CFCA) monthly Support Group. These sessions provide

foster carers an opportunity to raise issues of concern, improve communication and consultation on how we can improve the service. The rota includes Wendy Tomlinson and Philip Segurola. In response to the request from foster carers, we are inviting HOS and Service Managers across Children Services to these sessions.

### **3.2 Fostering Panel**

- The ADM and Independent Chair of Fostering Panel has continued to have quarterly meetings to review the work of the panel, share information about QA and any developments in the service. The Independent Chair of the panel also contributed to the case audit during the Review of the service in 2017.
- The service have introduced a Matching Panel as a response to the high number of children in foster care who have not achieved permanency. During 2017, we were able to achieve a successful long term match for 25 children with care plans for long term fostering. The panel has proved to be very popular among children and foster carers. We have reviewed our procedures on achieving permanency for children in long term fostering.
- Staff Sickness has reduced dramatically with staff feeling more confident and proud to be part of the service. Staff were open and engaging during the two Fostering Reviews and poor practice is regularly challenged. Managers are able to challenge unacceptable standards of practice and support is available to resolve complaints in a timely manner.
- We have introduced a quarterly Newsletter to improve communication with foster carers and the recent award of an MBE to one of our foster carer was the highlight of the year.
- We are reviewing our practice in line with the Strengthening Families model across Children's Services and it will impact on how we fulfil our aspirations for our children and young people. The approach is to provide systemic, strengths and relationship-based support to all our children, young people and families.

### **3.3 Recruitment & Assessment**

- Going forward, the Council is currently reviewing its plans for achieving its sufficiency of placements. The need to recruit adequate foster carers to meet the rising needs of our children is a high priority and the service will be working with third parties to bring the service in house by 2020. We have a stable staff with high percentage of permanency and we continue to review training needs of staff members to ensure we are in a position to meet the challenges of children with complex needs.

## **4. CONSULTATION**

N/A

## **5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

N/A

**6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER**

N/A

**7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

N/A

**8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

N/A

**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

N/A

**10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

N/A

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**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**

1. Fostering Action Plan 2018
2. Review of the Fostering Services by achieving for children