

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Tuesday, 26 August 2008

at 4.30 pm

in Committee Room B

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

Councillors Aiken, Fleet, Griffin, Kaiser, London, McKenna, Preece, Shaw and Simmons

Co-opted Member: David Relton

Resident Representatives: Christopher Akers-Belcher, Joan Steel and Sally Vokes

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

3.1 To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2008

4. RESPONSES FROM THE COUNCIL, THE EXECUTIVE OR COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL TO FINAL REPORTS OF THIS FORUM

None

5. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEWS REFERRED VIA SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

None

6. **CONSIDERATION OF PROGRESS REPORTS / BUDGET AND POLICY
FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS**

None

7. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service

7.1 Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Setting the Scene Report –
Assistant Director of Children's Services (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)

7.2 Evidence from the Children's Services Portfolio Holder

(a) Covering Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*

(b) Verbal evidence from the Children's Services Portfolio Holder

8. **ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM FORWARD PLAN**

9. **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT**

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

i) **Date of Next Meeting Monday, 8 September 2008, commencing at 4.30 pm
in the Council Chamber**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

21 July 2008

The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm. in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Jane Shaw (In the Chair)

Councillors: Martyn Aiken, Mary Fleet, Frances London, Arthur Preece and Chris Simmons

Also Present: In accordance with Paragraph 4.2 (ii) Councillor Rob Cook was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Sheila Griffin

Resident Representatives: Joan Steel and Sally Vokes

Young Peoples Representatives: Arran Frame, Dean Jeffries, Lindsey Holmes, Gillian Pounder, Hannah Shaw and David Whittingham

Officers: Stephen Haley, Head of Finance, Asset Management & Student Support
Sue Johnson, Assistant Director, Planning and Service Integration
Ian Merritt, Head of Commissioning and Children's Partnership
James Walsh, Scrutiny Support Officer
Sarah Bird, Democratic Services Officer

Also present: Beth Hawkrige, Barnados
Nikki Pearson, Barnados B76/Hartlepool Young Voices
Jill Bousfield, Barnados B76/Hartlepool Young Voices
Jackie McGarry, Connexions/Hartlepool Young Voices
Rebecca Wise, West View Project

11. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Griffin and Kaiser.

12. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

13. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2008 were confirmed as an accurate record.

14. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum – Portfolio Holder's Response to the Access to Recreation Activities for Children and Young People in Hartlepool – Assistant Director, Planning and Service Integration

The Assistant Director, Planning and Service Integration presented the report in order to provide members of the Scrutiny Forum with feedback on the recommendations from the investigation into the access to recreation activities for children and young people in Hartlepool. The Final Report of this Scrutiny Forum was considered by Cabinet on 23 June 2008. Cabinet approved the recommendations in their entirety and Appendix A of the report provided details of each recommendation and proposed actions to be taken. Further progress reports were to be provided bi-annually to enable Members to monitor the implementation of their recommendations.

In relation to recommendation (b) of the Appendix 'that as part of any planned future recreation activities consideration be given to the use of 'pods' and youth shelters with the close involvement of young people, and other stakeholders, throughout the process from location/selection of structure to planning application' the Chair asked that the proposed seminar should be held at a time when young people were able to attend.

Regarding recommendation (d) of the Appendix 'that further work be undertaken to increase the marketing of recreation activities to target all young people and their families across Hartlepool', it was noted that there was already an increased amount of information on the website. Following a query from a Member, the Assistant Director, Planning and Service Integration agreed that young people would be involved with the development of the website. Beth Hawkrige confirmed that there had been a consultation to start the process off and feedback had been given by the Connexions team as well. Councillor Simmons said that he was delighted to hear that the availability of transport was being looked at.

Decision

Members noted the proposed actions detailed within the Action Plan.

15. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum – Portfolio Holder's Response to the Sustainability of Externally Funded Community Initiatives in Schools – Head of Finance

The report was presented by the Head of Finance in order to provide members of the Forum with feedback on the recommendations from the investigation into the sustainability of externally funded community initiatives in schools. On 7 July 2008 Cabinet considered the Final Report of this forum and Appendix A of the report provided feedback from the Portfolio Holder following Cabinet's consideration and decisions in relation to the recommendations of the Forum. Further progress reports would be produced for the Forum in order that monitoring of the implementation could take place.

Councillor Simmons asked what would happen to those schools whose facilities were already in deficit, some through no fault of their own and whether these balances be written off. The Head of Finance responded that the financial position on all facilities was being individually reviewed and recommendations on the treatment of deficits could not be made at this stage. The full position would be reported to members and the schools Forum in due course. The Chair asked about money obtained from Sports England and was informed that this was for capital works and if the facilities ceased to operate, then Sports England would be entitled to ask for this money back, therefore it was imperative that such facilities were kept open to retain this money.

Decision

Members noted the proposed actions detailed in Appendix A of the report.

16. Consideration of request for scrutiny reviews referred via Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

No items.

17. Consideration of progress reports/budget and policy framework documents

No items

18. Children and Young People's Plan 2009 – 12 Reference Group – Scrutiny Support Officer

The Scrutiny Support Officer sought a maximum of six nominations from the Forum to act as a reference group for the development of the above named

plan. Beth HawkrIDGE agreed to liaise later with the Scrutiny Support Officer to provide the names of two young people who were willing to attend the reference group.

Decision

It was agreed that the reference group would consist of the Chair, Councillor Martyn Aiken, Resident Representatives Christopher Akers Belcher and Sally Vokes and two young people who would be nominated.

19. Determining the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum's Work Programme for 2008/09 – Scrutiny Support Officer

The report was presented by the Scrutiny Support Officer in order to provide the Forum with detail of the second topic for inclusion into the Work Programme for the 2008/09 Municipal Year.

The young people gave a presentation on their chosen topic 'appropriate accommodation for homeless young people for whatever reason'. The young people agreed that finding appropriate accommodation for homeless young persons was extremely difficult for a number of reasons. The main issues appeared to be:-

- ❖ that there are different options available for those aged 16 – 18 and those over 18
- ❖ benefit rules appear complicated for young people to obtain
- ❖ limited availability of accommodation for homeless young people
- ❖ lack of support for young people without drug or alcohol issues
- ❖ support for young people leaving care

The young people were extremely concerned about this issue and also cited an example of a young male earning £1,000 per month who was unable to get a home because landlords required a bond and rent in advance. Supported accommodation appeared to be a better option with a view to eventual independence. The difficulties in obtaining benefits for those under 18 were highlighted as in some cases the Benefits Agency would contact parents which may mean that young persons were forced into returning to an unsafe home environment. The young people were aware that some Authorities operate a 'Night Stop' which is a bank of people who have been approved to offer an overnight stay to a young person without a bed for the night and hoped to investigate this further to see whether this may be suitable for Hartlepool. The young people had also highlighted that it could be difficult to obtain support for young people who did not have drug or alcohol issues, but who had found themselves to be homeless for whatever reason. The young people stated that good things had been said about supported accommodation available to young people leaving care, e.g. the accommodation in St Paul's Road but hoped that similar accommodation could be made available for all homeless young people.

In conclusion the young people asked that the Forum could address these issues by talking to young people who had experienced them as well as contacting organisations involved in supporting them. Suggestions to contact Housing Hartlepool, Adult Services, the Leaving Care team, Shelter, the Homelessness Forum, a Young Person's Advisor from the Job Centre and a representative from Private Sector Housing were put forward as well as visiting some of the available options in Hartlepool and those of other Authorities.

All members of the Forum expressed their support for the investigation of this topic which would be the second topic for investigation in the current Municipal Year. A scoping report was envisaged for January 2009.

Decision

The members of the Forum noted the content of the presentation by the young people's representatives and agreed that the topic 'Appropriate accommodation for homeless young people for whatever reason' should be chosen as the second work programme for the current Municipal Year.

20. Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Scrutiny Support Officer

The Scrutiny Support Officer presented the scoping report to members of the Forum for their forthcoming investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service.

The following terms of reference for the investigation were suggested:-

- ❖ To gain an understanding of the role and responsibility of Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Service
- ❖ To assess the marketing campaign targeted at potential foster carers who are 'new' to the Authority
- ❖ To compare the recruitment and retention rates in Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Service both locally and nationally drawing on models of 'best practice'
- ❖ To examine the Fostering Service's placement strategy with specific reference to the use and role of Independent Fostering agencies, the level of support and advice provided to foster carers and comparison of remuneration levels for foster carers locally and nationally
- ❖ To investigate the provision of support to kinship carers and compare its equability to Hartlepool Borough Council's foster carers
- ❖ To review the Authority's implementation of special guardianship arrangements

Potential sources of evidence were suggested as being:-

- ❖ Children's Services Portfolio Holder
- ❖ Children's Services Department Officers
- ❖ Independent Fostering Agencies

- ❖ Foster Carers
- ❖ Neighbouring Local Authorities
- ❖ Ward Councillors
- ❖ Local residents
- ❖ Neighbourhood Consultative Forums
- ❖ Representatives of minority communities of interest or heritage
- ❖ The Department for Children Schools and Families' White Paper ' Care Matters: Time for a Change
- ❖ Fostering.net website

The potential funding options and proposed timetable of the investigation were outlined in the report.

Councillor Simmons stated that he was delighted that Hartlepool was considered 'good' for fostering by OFSTED but added that this may be because it was for 'best value' reasons. He said that because some of the fostering in the Authority appeared to be in the hands of agencies, the investigation would hopefully increase remuneration for independent fosterers to bring them more in line with agencies. The Head of Commissioning and Children's Partnership stated that 90% of foster carers within the authority were actually 'in house' providers and the 10% met through independent agencies were usually because the in-house carers were unable to meet the needs of the young people. He stated that currently Hartlepool fees were above the national average and a retainer was paid to those in-house providers. Councillor Simmons queried why some carers preferred to be part of an agency rather than the Authority.

The Chair pointed out that some children/young people were unable to stay in Hartlepool because of safety reasons but the kinship/guardianship avenue should be explored as this may result in a decrease in the number of foster carers necessary. She stated that information on the options open to children/young people should be provided in schools and the main shopping centre in town. The young people suggested that information should also be available in youth centres.

The Chair suggested that the young people should look at marketing campaigns in this Authority as well as those of neighbouring Authorities.

Decision

Members agreed the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Forum's remit of the investigation as outlined in paragraph 4.1 of the report and an amendment to the proposed timetable by the addition of an extra meeting in September 2008.

The meeting concluded at 5.40 pm

CHAIR

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

26 August 2008



Report of: Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE
PROVISION – SETTING THE SCENE REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to set the scene for the beginning of the Forum's investigation into 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision'.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting on the 16 June 2008 the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum selected 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision' as its first topic for investigation during the 2008/09 Municipal Year.
- 2.2 The Forum, on the 21 July 2008, agreed the scope and remit of the investigation and approved its aim as being 'to review Hartlepool Borough Council's recruitment and retention activity in relation to Foster Carers, including the provision of guidance and support to foster, kinship and special guardianship carers'.
- 2.3 Based upon the agreed scope and remit for the investigation, outlined within this report is a range of information the intention of which is to set the scene for the beginning of the Forum's investigation.

3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 Children in foster care can be aged from birth to 18 years and beyond. Children can be cared for alone or alongside brothers and sisters and may be cared for a matter of days, months or years. All children placed in foster care are 'looked after', that is they are accommodated at their own request (aged 16 and over) or the request of the parent/person with parental responsibility under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, or are the subject of a Care Order or Interim Care Order.

- 3.2 Foster carers can be individuals who have applied to and been assessed and approved as foster carers by the Council or 'kinship' carers, people known to the child, within the extended family or social network, who have been assessed and approved as carers for a specific named child.
- 3.3 Foster care services and the work of foster carers have evolved out of a volunteering history. In the past, foster carers were regarded as volunteers, primarily women at home bringing up their own children, who provided care for children within their home and were generally paid an allowance to cover the costs incurred in caring for a child. However, much has changed over the past 30 years. There are now more children than ever living in foster care and far fewer children being placed in children's homes. The needs of children placed in foster care are increasingly complex and the foster carers' role has changed from volunteer to professional. Foster carers now need to be able to manage complex and difficult tasks, ensuring children maintain regular contact with family, meeting with professionals and keeping detailed records. Foster carers are expected to be skilled in child development and need to have an understanding of the impact of abuse. They must adhere to prescribed standards and a regulatory framework and the Government has recently announced a post approval qualification and development framework for foster carers.
- 3.4 There is no simple description of what foster carers do and the term foster care covers a wide spectrum of situations. Foster care can provide:
- Short break care for birth families with disabled children who have high support needs (short break care)
 - Temporary care for children when families are experiencing a crisis
 - Care for children who have been abused or neglected
 - Care for children who need therapeutic help
 - Permanent families for children whose birth families cannot look after them and where adoption is not an appropriate option
 - Care for children as an alternative to remand or secure accommodation.
- 3.5 Foster care aims to provide children with safe and meaningful relationships, all the practical benefits of a home life, stimulation, guidance and advocacy and the knowledge to negotiate and access education, health and other services essential to a child or young person's growth and development. Foster carers are required to work with the child or young person's birth family and a wide range of professionals with the aim of returning the child/young person back home as quickly as possible where this is deemed to be in the child's best interests. Approximately half of children who have been placed in foster care go home within the first six months. Others remain in foster care for longer periods of time. Research¹ suggests that if a child does not return home within the first six months of becoming a 'looked after child', this dramatically reduces the likelihood of the child returning home at all.

Biehal, N (2006) Reuniting Looked After Children with their Families: A Review of the Research. NCB

3.6 There are four basic principles that should underpin foster care provision:

- **Close relationships** – children want and need close relationships. Children who have strong relationships with adults tend to have better outcomes. Foster care should enable and nurture positive relationships with family members, carers, teachers and counsellors
- **Change and development** – foster care can be a springboard for improving life chances of vulnerable children.
- **Choice** – children cannot have everything they want; but it is essential to know and respect what they want. Children who want to be fostered are less likely to have placement breakdowns.
- **Coherence** – there should be coherence between what happens in foster care and what happens afterwards.

4. LEGAL CONTEXT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

4.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services issued under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 provide the regulatory framework for the delivery of foster care. The National Minimum Standards focus on achievable outcomes for children and young people and the impact on the individual of the services provided. The standards are grouped under a series of key topics:

- Statement of Purpose
- Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service
- Management of a fostering service
- Securing and promoting welfare
- Recruiting, checking managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers
- Records
- Fitness of premises
- Financial requirements.

4.2 Compliance with the Regulations and National Minimum Standards is monitored through inspection by Ofsted. Within the inspection process, the National Minimum Standards are mapped to one of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Until 2008, inspections of fostering services were carried out on an annual basis by Ofsted. The Government has recently indicated its intention to move to three yearly inspections for fostering services judged as 'good' or 'outstanding'.

5. LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS

5.1 Hartlepool Borough Council is a registered fostering provider. Foster care services are delivered by the Family Placement Team based in Aneurin Bevan House where there are four full time social workers. The services provided by the fostering team fall into two broad categories:

Those provided to registered foster carers and potential foster carers

- initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers
- preparation training for applicants
- competency based assessments of applicants
- support systems for approved foster carers
- post-approval training for foster carers
- consultation with carers over development of service

Those provided to social work staff who need a placement for a child

- a duty social worker available during office hours Monday to Friday
- provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council
- liaison with other agencies to identify suitable placements where none are available within our own resources
- Provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

5.2 The council currently has 79 approved foster carers including nine carers who provide short break care for disabled children and nine foster carers who are assessed as 'kinship' carers for named children. The fostering service provides a full range of foster placement types including short term/assessment placements, long term/permanent placements and short break care.

5.3 As at 1 August 08, there were 162 children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council. Of these, 82% were placed in foster care. This includes placements delivered by the Council's fostering service as well as placements commissioned from the independent sector. Of the current looked after population 54% are placed with foster carers approved by the Council. The vast majority of these carers live in Hartlepool, however, there are some foster carers who offer long term permanent placements to children that live outside of the Council boundaries.

5.4 The aims of the Council's fostering service as set out in the Fostering Service Annual Statement of Purpose are as follows:

- To provide a range of foster placements for those children looked after by the Council requiring a family placement.
- To ensure that foster carers are provided with the skills, knowledge and support to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children placed and provide a safe and secure home environment.
- To recruit a range of foster carers to provide placements for children of different ages, abilities, backgrounds and assessed needs.
- To prepare, assess, train, supervise and support a range of foster carers to look after those children and young people who are cared for in a family placement setting.

- To, in its delivery, support Hartlepool Children's Services in meeting the five Every Child Matters outcomes

5.5 The objectives of the service as laid out in the Annual Statement of Purpose are as follows:

- To plan and implement effective recruitment campaigns and strategies in order to attract the range of carers identified to meet the needs of the looked after population.
- To undertake effective assessments of prospective carers within specified timescales.
- To establish and support a Fostering Panel to consider assessments and make recommendations for approval to the agency decision maker.
- To provide pre and post approval training for applicants and carers, equipping them to meet the needs of this group of children and young people.
- To provide regular recorded supervision and support contacts with carers by suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- To ensure that additional support is available to carers to underpin placement stability and improve outcomes for children in placement.
- To protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.
- To create stability for children and young people in foster care.
- To achieve better life chances for looked after children particularly in relation to health, education and employment and leisure activities.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members where appropriate.
- Prepare young people adequately for when they eventually leave their foster placement.
- Create lifelong attachments with carers in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- Work in partnership with children and young people, their parents and carers and social workers.
- Provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his or her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.

5.6 The fostering service is inspected on an annual basis and the last inspection took place in August 2007. The overall quality rating for the service was 'good'. The inspectors positively commented on the view of carers that the service had improved over the previous 12 months, that systems had been developed to improve the administration process and the training needs of foster carers had been reviewed. The inspection made one statutory recommendation about the need to develop and maintain a foster carer's register and three 'good practice' recommendations.

6. FOSTER CARE PAYMENTS

- 6.1 In 2004, the Council implemented its Carers Progression Payment Scheme. The aim of the scheme was to recognise the abilities of foster carers and make payments linked to their skills and expertise with a view to reducing the number of carers leaving the council and attract new prospective carers to the council. This scheme continues to date. Foster carers commence at Band One and can then progress through the Bands up to Band Five as they demonstrate that they meet specified progression criteria. There are also other payments and rewards built into the system for example long service payments. The table below outlines the current payments to foster carers for the Council

Band One	Age related allowance only
Band Two	£76 per week plus age related allowance
Band Three	£151 per week plus age related allowance
Band Four	£226 per week plus age related allowance
Band Five	£345 per week plus age related allowance

- 6.2 Upon implementing the Carers Progression Payment Scheme, the Council adopted the Fostering Network minimum recommended rates as their age related allowance and has uplifted this in line with the calculated rate annually. Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for everyone involved in fostering. The recommended minimum rate of Fostering Network is calculated to cover the costs of looking after a fostered child and is recognised as a realistic age related allowance. The current minimum recommended rates of Fostering Network paid by Hartlepool are:
- 0-4 years £121.68
 - 5-10 years £138.61
 - 11-15 years £172.55
 - 16+ years £209.86
- 6.3 Through the Children Act 2004, the Government introduced provision for a national minimum weekly allowance to be paid to foster carers and in 2007 issued the minimum rates. There is an expectation that all service providers will comply with these rates, however, The Children Act 2004 does give government powers of enforcement. These rates are significantly below the Fostering Network recommended rates as they represent a minimum allowance that should be paid. In order to attract new carers and retain existing carers, the Council continues to pay the Fostering Network recommended weekly allowances as do many other local authorities across the country.
- 6.4 On an annual basis, Fostering Network publishes a survey of allowances and fee payment schemes for all local authorities. The following information provides a picture of allowances paid by Hartlepool in comparison to the other 11 local authorities in the North East. This information relates to the 2007/08 financial year which explains the slight differential in allowances paid by those authorities who pay the Fostering Network minimum rates.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	0 – 4 YEARS	5 – 10 YEARS	11 – 15 YEARS	16 + YEARS
Darlington	£118.60	£135.10	£168.18	£204.55
Durham	£83.02	£93.03	£117.04	£143.01
Gateshead	£118.60	£135.10	£168.18	£204.55
Hartlepool	£118.60	£135.10	£168.18	£204.55
Middlesbrough	£93.60	£116.28	£144.62	£187.20
Newcastle	£99.51	£123.69	£153.86	£199.22
Northumberland	£118.60	£135.10	£168.18	£204.55
North Tyneside	£135.10	£135.10	£229.18	£157.36
Redcar and Cleveland	£100.00	£113.00	£129.00	£167.00
South Tyneside	£100 - 102	£133.00	£129.00	£156.86
Stockton on Tees	£118.60	£135.10	£168.18	£204.55
Sunderland	£100 – 102	£113.00	£130.95	£169.55

- 6.5 In terms of fee payment schemes these vary significantly between councils and it is difficult to compare like with like, however the following table shows the remuneration to foster carers from the North East local authorities.

LOCAL AUTHORITY	SCHEME	FEE
Darlington	Payment dependent upon experience and qualifications.	£30 – 70 (not per child)
Durham	Payment for Skills Band C Band D Band E	£73.29 £226.24 £378.56
Gateshead	Contract Carers (max fees for 2 children	£207.22
Hartlepool	Band One Band Two Band Three Band Four Band Five	£0.00 £76.00 £151.00 £226.00 £345.00
Middlesbrough	Band A Band B Band C	£0.00 £50.00 £150.00
Newcastle	Standard Expenses Payment ACORN (10+)	£56.21 287.83
Northumberland	Full time carers fee payment 2 nd bed fee New Start	£173.88 61.74 25,000 annually

North Tyneside	Mainstream Carers Fee Specialist weekly fee	£90.00 125.00
Redcar and Cleveland	Band A Band B Band C Specialist Teenage Scheme	£0.00 £50.00 £100.00 £500.00 £300.00
South Tyneside	Band A Band B Band C Pathway	£20.00 £40.00 £60.00 £287.54
Stockton on Tees	Level 2 Level 3	£125.00 £350.00
Sunderland	Level 2 (age related enhancement) Level 3 (plus age related enhancement)	£9.98 - £28.25 £187.02

7. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF CARERS

- 7.1 Hartlepool's recruitment strategy is reviewed annually. All enquirers are asked where they obtained the contact details of service and this information is analysed in order to target specific campaigns. Methods currently used are based on the 'drip feed' of information by leaflets displayed in council and public buildings in the town, local advertising in the Hartlepool Mail, Northern Echo and Evening Gazette, plus 'Hartbeat' and 'Street' magazines. An advertisement appears annually in the Yellow Pages and Yell.com. Advertisements for carers for specific children are also placed in the local media. Foster Care fortnight occurs annually in May and during this period additional activity takes place to promote fostering and raise awareness in the community.
- 7.2 Enquiries regarding fostering are responded to by sending an Information Pack out within one day of the enquiry being received. Once the return slip is received from the enquirer a home visit is normally made within five working days. Information about the assessment process is given and information about the family is gathered, including their motivation to foster. Prospective carers are given a period of approximately two weeks to consider whether they want to proceed with a formal application.
- 7.3 Once prospective carers make the decision they wish to be assessed as foster carers, they are required to participate in a foster care training programme, attending training sessions delivered over a number of weeks and undergo a home study assessment. Upon completion of the training and

assessment, documentation is submitted to the Fostering Panel, a meeting with the mandate of considering and making recommendations for the approval of prospective carers. The Panel is made up of an independent Chair, Hartlepool Borough Council Members, managers from within Children's Services and independent members who may themselves be foster carers or have experience of fostering.

- 7.4 Once a foster carer has been approved by Panel they complete a foster care agreement and are provided with the Foster Carer Handbook. All foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker from the Fostering Service. This person will visit the foster carers, provide formal supervision and provide directly, or facilitate access to, any practical, emotional or professional support required. Foster carers are normally visited monthly and provided with formal supervision. Foster carers are provided with equipment to enable them to care for a child in placement.
- 7.5 Foster carers receive additional support via a monthly support group that is facilitated by two members of staff from the team. The group is an opportunity to build networks of support amongst other carers, exchange ideas about fostering and have the opportunity to hear guest speakers who are periodically arranged. The Fostering Service operates a duty system within office hours which is staffed by a fostering service worker. Foster carers can access support and advice from this worker if their allocated worker is not available. An out of hours telephone support service is also available staffed by managers within Safeguarding and Specialist Services.
- 7.6 All foster carers receive full membership of Fostering Network and access to an independent advice and mediation service including provision for legal advice.

8. PLACEMENTS IN THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

- 8.1 Over the past ten years, the landscape of fostering services has changed significantly. Historically, foster care was delivered by local authorities with a few independent fostering agencies that were small in size and offered specialist placements. However, there is now a mixed economy of foster care provision with an expanding independent sector that is placing pressure on local authorities and making it more difficult to recruit new and retain existing foster carers. In response to this situation, in April 2004 'Excellence in Care: A Strategy for Developing Services for Children Looked After' was produced by the Council. This strategy set out an analysis of the needs of looked after children and the anticipated future direction of travel that would be required to meet the future needs of looked after children. Implementation of this strategy enabled the Council to reduce its number of children in residential care and placed the Council in a strong position to be able to continue to recruit and retain carers by introducing the Carers Progression Payment Scheme.
- 8.2 There are currently 32 children looked after placed in independent foster placements at a projected annual cost of £1,378,513. The vast majority of these children are placed outside of the council boundaries and in

neighbouring authorities like Stockton and Darlington. The main reason children are placed in an independent fostering agency placement is the lack of capacity within in house provision to meet the demand for placements. Placements are arranged with independent fostering agencies when all in house options have been explored and exhausted, this is often in an emergency situation when children are regarded as at immediate risk of harm and require a placement the same day as the request is made.

- 8.3 In order to prevent a spiralling situation of spot purchasing placements from the independent sector, a review was undertaken of the Council's Placement Strategy in 2007. This review found that the national upward trend in children looked after was reflected in Hartlepool. This was despite a robust gate keeping system being in place where all admissions were considered by a Placement Panel involving senior management. The review recommended that additional resources be allocated to the Family Placement Team to facilitate expansion and that the local authority develops a preferred provider partnership with a contractual cost and volume agreement. In the 2008/09 budget, a budget pressure of £133,000 was added to the Family Placement Budget to create new posts to increase the capacity of the team. These posts are currently being recruited to. The Council has also tendered for preferred provider partnerships and in the autumn of 2008, the Council will enter into a preferred provider contract with National Fostering Agency.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- . That Members consider the information provided as part of the first evidence gathering session for this investigation.

Contact Officer:- Sally Robinson – Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)
Children's Services Department
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 523733
Email: sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer entitled 'Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Scoping Report' presented to the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum on 21 July 2008
- (ii) British Association of Adoption and Fostering Position Statement 2: Skills Protect
- (iii) DFES Fostering Now: Messages for Elected Members
- (iv) National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services
- (v) Excellence in Care A Strategy for Developing Services for Children Looked After by Hartlepool Borough Council April 2004

- (vi) Children's Services Portfolio Holder report entitled 'Review of Placement Strategy' presented to the Portfolio Holder meeting on 13 November 2007
- (vii) Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose
- (viii) Ofsted 'Inspection Report for Local Authority Fostering Service' August 2007

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

26 August 2008



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE PROVISION – EVIDENCE FROM THE AUTHORITY'S PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES – COVERING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Forum that the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services has been invited to attend this meeting to provide evidence in relation to the ongoing investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of this Forum on 21 July 2008, the Terms of Reference and Potential Areas of Inquiry / Sources of Evidence were approved by the Forum for this scrutiny investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision.
- 2.2 Consequently, the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Children's Services has been invited to this meeting to provide evidence to the Forum in relation to her responsibilities, and views on, Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision.
- 2.3 During this evidence gathering session with the Authority's Children's Services Portfolio Holder, it is suggested that responses should be sought to the following key questions:-
- (a) What are your roles and responsibilities in relation to the provision of the Authority's Foster Care Service?
 - (b) What are the current challenges that the Authority's Foster Care Service faces?

- (c) In relation to (b), how might the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum assist in helping the Foster Care Service meet these challenges?

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum consider the views of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services in relation to the questions outlined in section 2.3.

Contact Officer:- James Walsh – Scrutiny Support Officer
Chief Executive's Department - Corporate Strategy
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 523647
Email: james.walsh@hartlepool.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Report of the Scrutiny Support Officer titled 'Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Scoping Report,' presented at the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum of 21 July 2008.