

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Monday, 6 October 2008

at 4.30 pm

in the Council Chamber

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

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

Co-opted Members: David Relton and 3 vacancies

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

Young Peoples Representatives: Arran Frame, Dean Jeffries, Chris Lund, Gillian Pounder, and 2 vacancies

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 8 September 2008 (*to follow*)

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 Kinship Care Report – *Assistant Director of Children's Services (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)*
- 7.2 Impact of Special Guardianship Orders – *Head of Business Unit (Young Persons)*
- 7.3 Evidence on the Marketing of Fostering in Hartlepool
 - (a) Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers – *Head of Business Unit (Young Persons)*
 - (b) Presentation by the Young Peoples Representatives
- 7.4 Evidence from Young People in Foster Care
 - (a) Covering Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*
 - (b) Written Evidence from Young People in Foster Care

8. ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM FORWARD PLAN

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- i) **Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday, 11 November 2008 commencing at 4.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

8 September 2008

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

Present:

Councillor Jane Shaw (In the Chair)

Councillors: Mary Fleet, Sheila Griffin, Frances London, Arthur Preece and Chris Simmons.

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

Young Peoples Representatives: Gillian Pounder, Chris Lund and Arran Frame.

Also Present: Elizabeth Hawkridge, Barnardos

Joanne Vayro, Chair of the Foster Carers Association
(Hartlepool)

Pauline Stomont, Team Manager (North Region), National
Fostering Agency

Gill Hall, National Fostering Agency

Officers: Sally Robinson, Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)

Pam Swainson, Participation Officer

John Robinson, Children's Fund Manager

James Walsh, Scrutiny Support Officer

David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

30. Apologies for Absence

Councillors Aiken, Kaiser and McKenna.

31. Declarations of interest by Members

None.

32. Confirmation of the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 August 2008

Confirmed.

33. Responses from the Council, the Executive or Committees of the Council to Final Reports of this Forum

No items.

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

No items.

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

No items.

36. Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Evidence from an Independent Foster Care Agency (*Scrutiny Support Officer*)

Pauline Stormont and Gill Hall from the National Fostering Agency (NFA) were present at the meeting and gave a short presentation to Members on the work and history of the NFA and its status as preferred independent supplier of fostering placements to Hartlepool BC. In the presentation it was indicated that:;

- That the NFA would recruit and assess its own foster carers independent of the authority.
- All carers would be recruited from within a 20 mile radius of Hartlepool.
- The NFA already had some carers in place following a recent recruitment campaign. These were new carers, so would receive additional support and training during early placements.
- The NFA would recruit experienced carers but had given an undertaking not to poach HBC carers.
- The local team would work closely with the HBC Fostering team on matching children and carers appropriately.
- The agency had a lower ratio of carers to workers than local authorities with an average of one worker to ten carers.
- Carers would have access to a known worker at all times.
- Recruitment through assessment to approval timescales were much shorter than the local authority average at four to six months on average.

- All carers were recruited to nationally approved standards
- The agency had been engaged to provide a range of placements including placements for younger children. This was unusual as local authorities tended to need assistance with older children and teenagers.
- Any local carers recruited by NFA where it was clear that they would be better suited to fostering for the local authority would be referred to the local authority.
- Applicants to be carers would also be advised to look to see what Hartlepool and other authorities could offer.
- NFA officers would be meeting HBC officers on a regular basis during the contract. In the early stages these meetings would be every six to eight weeks.

Members raised the following questions which were responded to by Pauline Stormont and Gill Hall from the National Fostering Agency: -

- Is the national Fostering Agency a private business? It was indicated that the NFA was a private company that had been involved in fostering predominantly in the south east but was now expanding its operations throughout the country.
- Would potential carers only be referred to the local authority based on the age range of the children they wished to care for? Potential carers would be referred to the local authority if they were more suited to caring for an age range of children that the NFA was not looking for carers for and only if it was likely that they would be suitable for the local authority.
- How did the ratio of carers to workers relate to local authorities ratios? The NFA's target maximum was one social worker to ten foster families/carers. The national average for local authorities was in the region of one worker to eighteen to twenty families/carers.
- How quickly would families be available to be NFA foster carers? The assessment and training process took, on average, four to six months. Carers were not, however, guaranteed a placement immediately at the end of the training and approval process.
- How would the NFA be able to offer 24/7 contact with a dedicated social worker?
Each family/carer would have one dedicated worker who would work with them most of the time. This worker would be available to contact by phone at all times. During holidays or periods of sickness, an alternative "buddy" worker would be available and the carers would also have that workers details. It was intended that carers and workers would meet on a regular basis, so they would get to know all the workers within the team, so that when an alternative worker was allocated, they knew who they were and had met them before. The workers would also have a good knowledge of all the carers within the agency.

Recommended

That the representatives from the National Fostering Agency be thanked for their informative presentation and answering Members questions.

37. Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Evidence from Hartlepool BC's Foster Care Agency *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

The Chair of the Hartlepool Foster Carers Association, Joanne Vayro, indicated that there was currently a waiting list of people wanting to be assessed and trained as foster carers in Hartlepool. This was primarily due to the inability of the department to undertake training and assessments due to staff shortages in the fostering team. The association was aware that some potential carers were being lost to the Authority's Foster Care Agency due to this delay, some going on to register with Independent Foster Agencies.

Training and assessment should ideally take around six months, though some carers in Hartlepool were commenting that their process had taken up to eighteen months, which was far from ideal. Carers were also commenting that the training events were often poorly organised and frequently lacked crèche facilities, something that was essential for those with children if both carers were to attend the training.

The Chair indicated that from her experience the comments in relation to staffing problems were accurate but that those in post were working extremely hard to move applicants on through the process. The issues in relation to training would need to be addressed by the Forum through recommendations in the final report.

The Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services) stated that the staffing problems were being addressed as speedily as the council procedures allowed. There had been quite a significant turn over of staff over recent months, though it was the Assistant Director's aim that all posts would be filled by Christmas of this year.

Members commented that the staffing situation was the nub of the problems experienced within the fostering team and by foster carers registered with the local authority agency. It was disappointing to hear that it would take a further three months to get the team up to full establishment. If it was proving difficult to provide the training in-house, had the department considered utilising external training agencies to undertake some or all of the work?

There was concern that the department appeared not to have a strategy for delivery of these services in place. The Assistant Director commented that there was a strategy in place for the fostering service but it needed a team manager to drive that forward, and that was one of the posts that was currently in the process of being filled. The Assistant Director agreed with Members comments that at this time it would not be prudent to undertake an advertising campaign for new foster carers when the service was already stretched. In relation to the time taken to train carers, the Assistant Director agreed that eighteen months, if this was correct, was too long and a reasonable period

would be six to nine months.

In terms of the current Fostering Team, the Assistant Director indicated that there were 80 foster carers approved within the town with approximately 160 children looked after. There was presently only an acting manager, three social workers and a support worker supporting eighty families. This was a cause for concern within the department and actions had been taken to mitigate against the problems as far as possible.

The authority was currently struggling to place very young children on short term placements, hence the need for assistance from the National Fostering Agency. The Authority's Foster Care Agency was doing very well with long-term placements; the problems in Hartlepool were unusual. Staff were working 'above and beyond' to ensure families received the care and support they needed. Other resources within the town, such as the STAR Centre were also being utilised to free-up qualified workers.

Members were concerned at the current situation and considered that more immediate action needed to be taken to ensure that Hartlepool foster carers were receiving the support they should be entitled to. Members were concerned at the ratio of workers to carers and requested information on any bench-marking that was carried out with other authorities. General concern was also expressed at the timescales being reported for the filling of vacancies.

The Assistant Director reported for Members information that the national recommended ratio of carers to workers was approximately fourteen to fifteen. In the North East the average was around eighteen to twenty. Over recent years the agency had recruited an average of six to eight foster carers each year, though with retirements and people moving out of the area, the total number of carers was fairly static. Wherever it could, the authority used its own agency carers for placements.

The Chair expressed concern that through no fault of its own, the Authority could be placing children and/or carers at risk through the current staffing situation. The Chair did accept that there was no simple quick fix. The Chair asked of the recently increasing number of Special Guardianship Order (SGO) approvals has made any difference to the service. The Assistant Director indicated that SGO's were proving to be popular for an increasing number of children and carers. Children in care particularly liked the SGO as it removed them from being a 'child in care', and any stigma associated with that. It did frequently mean that a fostering placement was also lost if the SGO was granted to current long-term foster carers. They did have to be viewed very positively, however, as they provided excellent outcomes for the children and young people concerned. Members asked for more details on Special Guardianship Orders and Kinship Placements for the next meeting.

In concluding, Members stated that their criticisms were not directed towards the staff in the Fostering Team in any way. The authority had arrived in a situation, not of its own making, but one that never-the-less caused extreme

concern for Members and one that should be addressed as a matter of some urgency.

The Chair asked Joanne Vayro, the Chair of the Hartlepool Foster Carers Association, to take back this Forum's thanks and appreciation for the excellent work that was undertaken by the foster carers in Hartlepool.

Recommended

1. That the comments of the Chair of the Hartlepool Foster carers Association be noted.
2. That the responses to the Forums questions given by the Assistant Director be noted.
3. That further information be supplied to the forum setting out details of the scope and function of Special Guardianship Orders and Kinship Carers.

38. Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service – Evidence from young people from Hartlepool BC's Foster Care Service
(Scrutiny Support Officer)

The Chair indicated that following a discussion with the Scrutiny Support Officer, the submission of evidence from the young people be deferred to the next meeting of the Forum.

Recommended

That the submission of evidence from the young people be deferred.

39. Issues Identified from the Forward Plan *(Scrutiny Support Officer)*

No items.

The meeting concluded at 5:35 p.m.

JANE SHAW

CHAIRMAN

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

8 October 2008



Report of: Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE PROVISION – KINSHIP CARE REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide information on kinship care for the Forum's investigation into 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision'.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Scrutiny has, as part of the investigation into the Council's foster care provision requested information on 'kinship' or 'family and friend care' arrangements.

2.2 This report will provide information on family and friends approved as foster carers for children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council and also comment upon other situations where children are cared for by family and friends but are not within the looked after system.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS

3.1 With regard to children looked after, the Children Act 1989 clearly prioritises family and friends placements, directing that when a child is looked after away from home, the local authority: *'Shall make arrangements to enable him to live with a relative, friend or other person connected with him, unless that would not be reasonably practical or consistent with his welfare'*. The accompanying guidance underlines the message: *'If young people cannot live at home, placement with relative or friends should be explored before other forms of placement are considered'*.

3.2 Family and friends or kinship care can be defined as situations where:

- The child cannot live with their parents and is living away from the parental home with a relative or friend;
- The placement has in some way been assisted/initiated and/or is supported by children's social care;

- The child would otherwise be with foster carers, in residential care, independent living or adopted.

3.3 The child may be provided with accommodation by the local authority by being placed with a relative or friend either by parental agreement (voluntary accommodated) or under a Care Order. In the latter circumstances the child is a looked after child with all that implies including care planning and review and leaving care responsibilities. Where a child becomes subject to a care order, the local authority has the power to place the child with a family member or friend under emergency regulations for a period of six weeks. If it is intended that the placement continues beyond this six week period, the family member or friend must be assessed as a named foster carer for the child and approved by the Family Placement Panel.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 The Dartington Hall Trust 'Research in Practice' group has recently produced a literature review of 'Family and Friends Care' (2008). The information below is taken from that document.

4.2 Grandparents and aunts/uncles, usually on the maternal side of the child's family are the principal providers of family and friends foster care. They are no older on average than non-related carers and are not disproportionately used for children from ethnic minority groups.

4.3 Children are generally reported to feel secure, happy and integrated into the family with studies reporting that this is more common than for children placed with stranger carers. Much of the research highlights the high levels of commitment demonstrated by carers, their strong bond with the children, the pleasure they find in the children themselves and the satisfaction they derive from caring. The weight of evidence support better placement stability in kinship care placements with children having fewer moves overall and before entering placement. However, the breakdown rate of placements with kinship carers compared with placement with non related foster carers was found to be almost identical. In both situations behavioural difficulties was the main reason for placement breakdown.

4.4 Kinship care contributes to the child's sense of security and personal identity; children usually go to people they know and with whom they have a shared culture. They are more likely to remain within the same neighbourhood and school. Many studies report children are likely to be either placed with siblings or have contact with siblings living elsewhere. Although carers' attitudes towards parents are not necessarily favourable and relationship difficulties are more common than in non relative placements, studies typically report that contact is more likely, though not necessarily with both parents. Research highlights the higher level of commitment carers have to contact taking responsibility for organising it and persisting despite difficulties.

4.5 The vast majority of placements studied were judged to be either positive for the child (73%) or adequate (14%), only 10% were considered to be

detrimental to the child. On a range of measures, health, education, emotional and behavioural development, children in kinship care placements appeared to do about as well as their peers in non relative foster placements.

5. LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The Council's '*Family and Friends as Foster Carers (Kinship Care)*' policy and procedure is attached at Appendix 1. There are currently nine foster carers approved by Hartlepool Borough Council as kinship carers for named children. The Council's policy on Special Guardianship promoting permanence and stability for children and young people and wherever possible seeking to move from care order to special guardianship orders has had an impact on the numbers of kinship placements. Kinship carers are more likely to want to move to a Special Guardianship arrangements because of their existing relationship with the child and their motivation in becoming a foster carer arising from their wish to care for a child from within their family. As a result, there has been a gradual decline in the number of children looked after placed with family and friend carers from 22% in 2002/03 to 8% in 2007/08.
- 5.2 Wherever possible and consistent with the child's welfare to do so, attempts are made to secure permanence for children with family and friend's carers without the need for the child to become or remain looked after. This can include supporting family and friends to seek Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Order during court proceedings or applying for an order for a child who is in a long term settled placement with a kinship carer.
- 5.3 Once it has been identified that a child needs to become looked after, family and friends placement options are explored with the child's parent/s. A Family Group Conference model is an effective way of bringing family members and other significant adults in the child's life together to consider options available for a child, either to support the parent in looking after the child or make arrangements for the child to be cared for within the family. Children's Services is currently exploring options to increase the use of family group conferences. Wherever possible, children are placed within their extended family or social network.
- 5.4 Once a looked after child has been placed with a prospective kinship carer, the carer is assessed as a named carer for that child. This involves a social worker from the fostering team assessing the carer/s against an assessment tool which has been specifically developed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) for kinship care. Upon completion of the assessment, this is presented to the Family Placement Panel for recommendation for approval. Once approved, kinship carers have access to the same support services as non relative carers as provided by the fostering team and will receive a fostering allowance for the child/ren. This support and allowance will continue for the duration of the placement and can also transfer should the carer wish to seek a Special Guardianship Order on the child.

6. OTHER FAMILY AND FRIEND ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 There are many other situations where children may be living with family and friends carers but are not looked after by the local authority. These can include
- Children on residence orders/special guardianship orders made through private law proceedings
 - Children living with relatives through mutual agreements within the family
 - Children living with wider family members or friends under private fostering arrangements
 - Children living with family or friends following intervention from children's social care but who are not looked after and supported under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 through provision of support services which may include financial support.
- 6.3 In many of these situations children are not known to children's social care. Some arrangements are ratified by the Court through private law proceedings whilst others are informal arrangements between families that do not involve authorities. With the exception of private fostering arrangements, families are not required to report arrangements to the local authority although they may seek assistance from the local authority where the child meets the criteria for services as a child in need. Where a child is subject to an order of the Court, for example a Residence Order, the local authority may have been required, under Section 7 of the Children Act 1989, to report to the court on matters relating to the child's welfare.
- 6.4 Privately fostered children are those whose parents have made arrangements, independently of the local authority, for their children to be cared for and provided with accommodation by someone who is not a relative (defined in the Children Act 1989 as a grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle [whether full blood or half blood affinity] or a step parent,) for more than 28 consecutive days. Private fostering has been a long-standing problem involving children who are potentially very vulnerable. The Children Act 1989 introduced additional requirements relating to privately fostered children and young people but inspections showed great variety in practice and raised concern that there could be significant numbers of children in these placements who are not known about by local authorities.
- 6.5 The death of Victoria Climbié brought to a head the issues in relation to safeguarding children in private fostering as the arrangement for her to live with her great-aunt should have been treated as a private fostering arrangement. In response to this enquiry and to lobbying from child care organisations, the Government has reviewed and updated the regulations which deal with private fostering and has introduced a set of National Minimum standards which have to be met by local authorities. These regulations and standards are subject to inspection by Ofsted.
- 6.6 Wherever possible, children's social care aims to work in partnership with families to support and maintain the child within his/her family. This may

entail the need for intervention to remove a child from a situation of significant harm and placement of the child with extended family members. One of the principles of the Children Act 1989 is that the courts should not make an order on a child unless it considers that to make an order would be better for the child than not to do so. Therefore attempts are made to support the child with family members without the resorting to Court orders. The Children Act 1989 makes arrangements under section 17 for the provision of support services and local authorities are required to provide a range and level of services appropriate to the child's needs, this can include the provision of financial support to maintain a placement.

6.7 In situations where children are placed with relatives by the local authority with the consent of the parent/person with parental responsibility, the local authority has a responsibility to undertake an assessment of the suitability of the placement. The assessment should consider what services, if any, are required by the child to safeguard and promote his/her welfare. The family members caring for the child should be given advice, guidance and assistance on, amongst other things:

- Steps they are required to undertake to safeguard the child;
- Promoting contact with parents/siblings/significant family members;
- Financial arrangements to support the placement – advising and supporting families to claim any benefits to which they are entitled, provision of assistance in kind or, in exceptional circumstances, in cash;
- Services required by the child and/or carer to promote the child's welfare

6.8 In exceptional circumstances where the placement could not be made or would be at risk of failing without the provision of financial support, the local authority can provide financial assistance to support the placement.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That Members of the Forum consider the information on kinship/ family and friend care as part of the evidence for this investigation.

Contact Officer:- Sally Robinson – Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services)
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 Hartlepool Borough Council
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- (i) Dartington Hall Trust Research in Practice Group 'Family and Friends Care' (2008).
- (ii) Hartlepool Borough Council 'Family and Friends as Foster Carers' Policy and Procedures

APPENDIX 1**FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS FOSTER CARERS (KINSHIP CARE)****Introduction**

This Procedure relates to the placement of children who are looked after by the Local Authority either under the terms of a Care Order or Interim Care Order or who are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. These procedures apply when consideration is being given to placing the child with family or friends known to them. A decision must have been reached stating that it is in the child's best interests to be looked after by the Local Authority.

Policy Statement

Hartlepool Borough Council believes that children should be securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood.

Research evidence suggests that children feel safe and secure and are likely to develop their potential when placed with family members or close friends within the family network.

Therefore, this Authority will, whenever a decision is reached that it is in the best interests of the child to be 'looked after' make all attempts to ensure family and friends have been explored as carers of the children.

Once identified as a possible placement, this department will undertake a thorough assessment to ensure the prospective carers are able to provide the child with a safe placement which is capable of promoting his/her needs.

The department are committed to ensuring the carer is supported financially, practically and emotionally and will assess the carer's needs and offer support in these areas.

Procedure

- a. Emergency and Intermediate placements by Local Authorities of children with friends or relatives (Regulation 38)
 1. Decision made by Head of Business Unit that it would be in child's best interests to be placed with family/friends.
 2. Immediate Police checks undertaken by Social Worker in respect of all adults over the age of 16 who will be residing in the household. These Police checks can be undertaken in an emergency by using the relevant form.

3. Social Worker inspects accommodation and proposed sleeping arrangements for the child to determine whether these meet the needs of the child.
 4. Social Worker will consult with parents/or persons with parental responsibility regarding the proposed placement. In the case of children placed under Section 20 of the Children Act, parental permission should be obtained for the placement and if refused, appropriate legal advice sought.
 5. Social Worker to consult with the child, if of appropriate age and understanding.
 6. Social Worker interviews the person who the child is to be placed with ascertaining their wishes and feelings and records findings.
 7. Complete Foster Care Agreement with the prospective carers.
 8. Social Worker prepares report and passes it to Head of Business Unit for agreement. The Report is then presented to the next available Looked After Panel (LAP).
 9. This arrangement can only continue as an Emergency Placement for a period not exceeding six weeks.
 10. When a child is placed outside of the Hartlepool Borough, the Social Worker must ensure that the LAC clerk is informed and that clerk sends the statutory notifications. Copies of these notifications must be kept on the child's file.
 11. The Social Worker must visit the child in placement at least once a week during the six week period. The child must be seen alone. The visit must be recorded on the child's file.
 12. If the arrangement is to exceed six weeks, the Social Worker should ensure that the Team Manager (Family Placement) is informed so that the assessment can be allocated to a member of that team.
- b. Procedures to formally approve family and friends as foster carers if placements are to exceed six weeks or where planned placements are to be made.
1. The standard assessment process will be completed for all Kinship Carers by staff of the Family Placement Team.
 2. BAAF Form F2 assessment to be completed.
 3. The completed Form F2 Assessment should be presented to Fostering Panel for recommendation of approval within six weeks of placement if

an immediate placement has been made or prior to placement if a planned placement is to be made.

4. If the plan is for the child to remain with the carers on a long-term basis, a Form E should also be completed and presented to the Panel alongside the Form F2. The Form E should be completed by the child's Social Worker.
5. If the plan is either for short-term placement or is unclear then the Form F2 Assessment should be presented to Panel accompanied by a short Report which includes profiles of the child's need, situation and department's plans.
6. The Foster Carer must sign a Foster Care Agreement prior to the child being placed. A signed copy should be placed in the Carer's file.
7. Minimum Visiting Frequency – The Social Worker should visit the child at least once within the first week. Then at intervals of no more than six weekly within the first year and then at intervals of no more than 3 monthly thereafter. The child must be seen alone and a record made of this visit on the child's file.
8. The Social Worker from the Family Placement Team is responsible for the supervision and support to the carers.

c. Financial Support

1. In all cases when the child is placed, the carers are entitled to the current fostering allowance payable from that budget.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

6 October 2008



Report of: Head of Business Unit (Young Persons)

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE PROVISION – IMPACT OF SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide information on Special Guardianship Orders for the Forum's investigation into 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision'.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Scrutiny has, as part of the investigation into the Council's foster care provision requested information on the impact of Special Guardianship Orders on the fostering service

2.2 This report will provide information on Special Guardianship Orders and in particular the impact it has had in terms of the Fostering Service of the Council.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS

3.1 The Adoption & Children Act 2002 amended the Children Act 1989 and with the associated Regulations governing them, introduced a new legal status called Special Guardianship. Special Guardianship Orders are intended to meet the needs of children who cannot live with their birth parents, for whom adoption is not appropriate, but who could still benefit from a legally secure permanent placement.

3.2 Special Guardianship Orders will:

- * Mean that the child is no longer looked after by the local authority and the day to day care of the child will become the legal responsibility of the carer;
- * Be legally secure;
- * Maintain the basic link between the child and their birth family;

* Be accompanied by access to a full range of support services, including (where appropriate) financial support from the local authority.

- 3.3 One particular group of children for whom Special Guardianship could provide an opportunity to secure their long term stability are those currently looked after by the Local Authority and matched, on a long term basis, with their current carers. For those children, there are no plans to return to the care of their birth parents during their childhood. The Portfolio Report of 25th August 2006 '*Special Guardianship – Financial Support Scheme*' identified, in addition to the improved outcomes for the children personally, specific benefits for the Local Authority. In particular, Special Guardianship could:
- Reduce the numbers of children looked after by the local authority;
 - Reduce the overall costs of children looked after;
 - Limit financial liabilities in respect of Independent Fostering Agencies;
 - Contribute to the Council's efficiency strategy.

4. SUBSEQUENT ACTIVITY

- 4.1 An exercise was completed to identify those children whose circumstances were such that a Special Guardianship Order would be an appropriate option to consider. Discussions were held with the carers, the children and the birth parents. Where there was agreement that a Special Guardianship Order was in the child's best interests, this was ratified at a formal looked after review and considered by the Council's Adoption Panel where any level of financial support was also identified. The following table sets out the number of Special Guardianship Orders granted since that time.

Period	Number of Special Guardianship Orders Granted
September 2006 – March 2007	3
April 2007 – March 2008	14
April 2008 – September 2008	4

- 4.2 In the majority of cases, the local authority foster carers no longer wished to continue their approval as a foster carer and thus were lost to the service. However, seven of them were able to continue to offer placements as a foster carer. Obviously, foster carers approved by Independent Fostering Agencies who were granted Special Guardianship Orders negotiated their status with their agency. As suggested by the report of 25th August 2006, there was a financial saving to the authority in those cases where the child was placed with an Independent Fostering Agency family.
- 4.3 There were significant efforts made to identify children whose best interests could be met by a Special Guardianship Order in the period immediately following the adoption of the recommendations of the 25th August 2006 report

leading to the significant number of Orders granted during 2007-08. Subsequently, the number of Orders has dropped and is likely to remain at this lower level in the future.

- 4.4 The assessment and training of new foster carers will include consideration of Special Guardianship Orders as an outcome for a placement if the child's circumstances might indicate that as an option. This could result in a number of foster carers being lost to the service each year adding a further pressure to the recruitment of carers.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That Members of the Forum consider the information on Special Guardianship Orders as part of the evidence for this investigation.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- (i) Children's Services Portfolio Report '*Special Guardianship – Financial Support Scheme*' 25th August 2006
- (ii) Adoption & Children Act 2002
- (iii) Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SCRUTINY FORUM**

6 October 2008



Report of: Head of Business Unit (Young Persons)

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE PROVISION – RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FOSTER CARERS

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information on the recruitment and retention of foster carers for the Forum's investigation into 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Provision'.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Scrutiny has, as part of the investigation into the Council's foster care provision requested information on recruitment and retention of foster carers
- 2.2 This report will provide information on the development of the strategies and their implementation for both the recruitment and retention of foster carers since the last major report in October 2004 – Cabinet report – A Strategy for Developing Services for Children Looked After by Hartlepool Borough Council.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 With regard to children looked after, the Children Act 1989 clearly prioritises family and friends placements, directing that when a child is looked after away from home, the local authority: *'Shall make arrangements to enable him to live with a relative, friend or other person connected with him, unless that would not be reasonably practical or consistent with his welfare'*. The accompanying guidance underlines the message: *'If young people cannot live at home, placement with relative or friends should be explored before other forms of placement are considered'*.

If, however, there are no family members willing, able and suitable to provide care for the child, then the Local Authority places children with approved

foster carers. Under the Fostering Services Regulations 2001, the Local authority recruits, trains and supports foster carers who can care for looked after children and young people. Alternatively, placements can be made with an Independent Fostering Agency that is subject to the same inspection and approval process as the Local Authority. The cost of such placements is significantly higher.

- 3.2 The Local Authority has been independently inspected regularly and consistently has been graded as 'Good' and approached 'Outstanding' at the most recent inspection.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

- 4.1 Fostering Network – a national umbrella organisation that promotes Fostering and lobbies on behalf of foster carers – sponsors 'Fostering Fortnight' when national publicity is generated to raise awareness of the need for foster carers and local authorities – most of whom are associate members of Fostering Network - harness that publicity to recruit locally.
- 4.2 Over the years, the timing of the event has changed in the light of feedback from organisations and it is now settled in May each year.
- 4.3 Marketing strategy research commissioned by Fostering Network has confirmed the widely held view that major initiatives do raise awareness and often coincide with a family's readiness to start the process of becoming a fostering family. However, it equally recognises that it is essential to ensure that families are aware on a regular basis that foster carers are needed with more targeted advertising.

5. LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 The Council's current strategy '*A Strategy for Developing Services for Children Looked After by Hartlepool Borough Council*' was adopted by Cabinet on 4th October 2004 after a review that used the experience of a high profile recruitment initiative in May 2004. Each year there has been a review of the strategy and adjustments made to take into account the staff situation and in particular any vacancies. It is counterproductive to actively recruit but have insufficient staff to undertake the assessment process with them and run the risk of alienating them. This has meant that on occasions there has not been a significant advertising initiative done in conjunction with Fostering Fortnight. However, the low key regular advertising – especially for specific children, including brothers and sisters – has remained at a high level with local newspapers and Hartbeat being the main vehicles for them. There have also been feature articles. This has resulted in a steady stream of applicants.
- 5.2 The action plans included in the October 2004 strategy have been implemented and refined in the light of experience and the further funding made available. Of particular relevance is the efforts to retain foster carers,

and the development of the Carers Progression Payment Scheme has led to a significant reduction in the loss of carers particularly to the private sector.

- 5.3 A commitment by the council to pay the nationally recommended fostering rates has meant that again there has been no loss of carers due to financial pressures.
- 5.4 Post approval training for foster carers has developed and will be enhanced as a result of the new National Minimum Standards that they will need to meet and this has added to the demands on the service.

6. IMPACT OF RECRUITMENT EFFORT ON NUMBER OF FOSTER CARERS

- 6.1 The following table gives a summary of the number of foster carers recruited each year and the total number of foster carers approved by the authority at each year end. Naturally, a number of foster carers reach the end of their career as carers during each year and a few transfer to other agencies due to a change of address. None have moved to the independent sector since the middle of 2004.

Month and Year	New Foster carers approved during the year	Total approved foster carers	Number of Enquiries
March 2003	10	45	67
March 2004	18	55	72
March 2005	10	64	165
March 2006	9	77	99
March 2007	15	77	133
March 2008	12	80	108
Sept 2008	10	79	57

- 6.2 The table reveals that there has been a gradual increase in the number of foster carers available to take our children although the rate has slowed down. There are 8 families currently in the process of assessment and all of them should be considered by the Fostering Panel before the end of March 2009. However, three foster carers have indicated their intention of retiring in the next few months.
- 6.3 As a result of further training, approximately 5 foster carers achieve NVQ awards each year and in general the annual foster carer reviews show that most foster carers are continuing to develop skills.
- 6.4 It also needs to be recognised that there is a drop out rate of people who respond to adverts but on learning more about fostering decide that it is not for them. When the advertising is focussed on particular children the number of applications can be quite small but the drop out rate is far less

than following a general effort when there are usually more applications. The high figure in the year ending March 2005 included the high profile advertising campaign involving the Hartlepool footballers etc. As can be seen, a high response rate does not necessarily result in a corresponding number of approved foster carers. Hopefully, even if people withdraw, they will have a more realistic picture of what fostering involves and can pass that information on to friends who might be interested subsequently.

- 6.5 A significant group of new foster carers are those family members who agree to take on the care of children who would otherwise have been placed with unrelated foster carers. A separate paper has been prepared that deals with this area of activity.
- 6.6 Regionally, while there has been little co-ordination of recruitment activity since the mid 1980s, an exception has been in the area of recruitment of ethnic minority carers. Most of the local authorities in the region, including Hartlepool, have joined together to target this specialised area of work and have contracted with a specialist agency to assist each of the authorities in ensuring that same ethnic matches are possible. Based on the relative success of this regional initiative, exploration is currently underway in the region and the Teesside area with a view to working more collaboratively.
- 6.7 Another significant development has been the agreement to secure a Preferred Provider from the Independent Fostering Sector as a way of managing the market when the local authority cannot meet the individual needs of a child from its own fostering resource. This is likely to be implemented from January 2009. In the meantime, individual arrangements are made from the whole range of Independent Fostering Providers at the market rate. Having a Preferred Provider will enhance joint recruitment initiatives, increase choice for children and increase the chances of them being placed in, or very near to, Hartlepool, since that was a condition of becoming a Preferred Provider.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That Members of the Forum consider the information on recruitment and retention of foster carers as part of the evidence for this investigation.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- (1) The Cabinet Report 'A Strategy for Developing Services for Children Looked After by Hartlepool Borough Council – 4th October 2004
- (2) The Fostering Services Regulations 2001

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

6 October 2008



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE PROVISION – EVIDENCE FROM YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE – COVERING REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To consider written evidence collated from the responses of young people in care of Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service.

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, written evidence has been collated from the young people in care of the Authority's Foster Care Service and an open invitation offered to the young people to present their views to the Forum.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 That Members of the Forum note the content of this report and the written evidence from the young people in the care of Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service.

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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.

Children's Services Scrutiny Forum investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Services

Responses from young people who are looked after or leaving care.

1. Tell us about your experience of Hartlepool's Foster Care Service?

- I had lots of different carers. Some very good some very bad. Sometimes I was moved very quickly without any warning which was very upsetting.
- My experience in care was the best 2 ½ years of my life. While I was in foster care I was loved for the person I am and did not get taken for granted. I loved it at my foster home and could not have asked for a better foster carer.
- I think things are not organised well because some social workers don't get involved enough and we need more events to do involving everyone. There should be more foster carers who are couples or married as children need good mums and dads to be involved.
- I have got a good foster family now and can see my own family when I want.
- It has been a rollercoaster. It was very unsettled until I came to live in a Hartlepool foster placement. I stayed with relatives and friends for a while now it is settled.
- Good but would like to know more about what services are available.
- Up to now Ok but I reckon it will become one of the best.
- Excellent. All support for most parts of my time was provided.

2. How much support did you receive outside of your Foster family during your time in care?

- Over many years I received really good support from T (Placement Support Worker) who helped me with a lot of things and introduced me to lots of different activities and also helped with family contact.
- While I was in care I received loads of support and when I needed somebody to talk to other than my foster carer I always had a member of staff at the end of the phone.
- Not a lot from my social worker but others help me like T (Placement Support Worker) and P (Participation Officer)
- I have loads of support outside but need some more from my placement support worker.
- Lots from Swiss. I hardly ever see anyone from Hartlepool.
- Majority of what I needed.
- Community support worker, CAMHS, Star centre, After Adoption Worker, Looked after nurse.

3. Were there any opportunities that you would have liked to have explored, but were unable to?

- I would like to go to London on the 'Be Heard' programme again.
- Placement support. (YP with agency carers)
- I would have liked to have been given the opportunity to live with my Mum even if it was just for a short time.
- I explored everything I wanted to while in care. There was not a weekend that went by that I did not get to go anywhere.
- No.

- No. I am going to college to do child care which is my ambition.

4. What changes (if any) would you like to see to Hartlepool's Foster Care Service?

- Too many changes of social worker, four in a year. I can talk more to my community support worker as I have seen her all the way through. It takes a while to get used to people and gain trust. Too many staff, involved, knowing about things that have happened.
- The meetings that foster carers attend should meet everybody's individual needs so that all of the carers can attend, not the same ones all of the time.
Recruitment of more carers.
- I would like to have been given the choice to come into foster care.
- Need more social workers. They have too much to do.
- Not much, just to see Placement Support Worker more.
- I would like them to do things I have asked them to do and let me know about it.
- I would like to stay with the same social worker instead of lots of different social workers.
Like social services to be honest and ask the views of children like me instead of just being told all the time.
- More support for filling out important applications and help arranging important things.
Activities and trips i.e. Tall ships

5. Is there anything else you would like to say?

- Loads more vouchers.

- There are too many rules and paperwork. We want to be treated like normal young people so if we want to put up pictures at the star centre it should be ok to put hooks in the walls.
- Meetings that include young people should be more relaxed, not too formal. They should have soft drinks, and the young people should be able to take part properly. The paperwork should be brief and easy to understand. The staff should not use big words. The staff should take time to get to know the young people but not ask too many personal questions.
- Would like the social workers to carers more positive things about kids instead of just negative.
- Just a huge thank you to Hartlepool's foster care service for making my time in care the best yet, and a BIG thank you to my foster carer.

**Additional comments from young people interviewed for other investigations.
Spring 2008**

Being looked after

More information/sensitivity/planning - pre-placement, the move to care and placement moves.

Contact with friends, extended family and ex-carers. Including sleeping over without police checks.

Now I am in care I feel safe there are no drugs and people coming to the house.

I wish they had got my sisters back home quickly.

I would like contact to be somewhere fun like the Whacky Warehouse.

My sisters are little so they are tired when we have contact after school. It would be better at the weekend.

I get sent letters I cannot understand they are written in big words and they are not friendly.

I want to see other people in my family and friends. I used to sleep at my gran's each week but now I can't.

I like being in foster care and to go to their caravan with my carers age 7

Comments from young people who are leaving care about good practice, improvements and moving into independent living. Obtained August 2008

Staff

- It is frustrating when the social workers are never there when you phone them.
- Too many changes of social worker.
- The support workers are better than the social workers because they have more time for you and listen to you.
- Support workers give emotional and practical support. They should train support workers to be social workers.
- Staff were there for me when I needed support.

Communication

- Some social workers don't listen, twist what you say and contradict themselves.
- They should listen to the young person not just to the parents/carers. They should talk to the young people away from their parents/carers.
- People do not understand what we are trying to say.
- Foster Carers do not need to know all of your family's business.

Coming into Care

- More should be done to work with families to prevent the children coming into care. They should be taken out as a family and be shown how to do activities together.
- The move to care should be planned and gradual. You should be able to visit the foster carers and to stay for the weekend to get used to each other first.
- Some carers are fair and treat foster children the same as their own but others treat them differently and that is not right.
- Foster carers should be close to home.
- There should be activities and opportunities for children and young people to meet others in care and for them to make friends.
- Being in care helped me get a better education.
- Everything about my care experience was the best in my life.

Moving On

- It is hard to move into independent living. It is very stressful and things get on top of you.
- There is not enough money and it is easy to get into debt. You do not realise how expensive it is living alone.
- It is hard living on your own. I wish I had not gone into independent living.
- Leaving Care or older young people should have a newsletter instead of the Chatabox magazine.
- Being in care helped me get a better education and helped me achieve my goals.