

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Thursday, 23 October 2008

at 4.30 pm

in 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 6 October 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 Evidence from View point Survey – *Scrutiny Support Officer*
- 7.2 Feedback from Site Visit
 - (a) Covering Report – *Scrutiny Support Officer*
 - (b) Verbal feedback from visit to Darlington Borough Council held on 9 October 2008
- 7.3 Evidence from Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Staff – *Scrutiny Support Officer*
- 7.4 Draft Final Report Recommendations – *Scrutiny Support Officer*

8. 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

23 October 2008



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO HARTLEPOOL
BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE SERVICE –
EVIDENCE FROM VIEWPOINT SURVEY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide evidence to the Forum of the results of the Viewpoint Survey into Foster Caring that was carried out in April 2006.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Viewpoint, Hartlepool Borough Council's Citizens' Panel, is one of the ways that the Council consults and involves local people in the governance of Hartlepool. It is a statistically balanced panel of local people who receive questionnaires at regular intervals throughout the year, asking for their view on a variety of local issues facing the Council and Hartlepool as a whole.
- 2.2 The aims of the survey are:-
- (i) To listen to the community;
 - (ii) To involve local people in the Council's decisions and in its policy, planning and reviews;
 - (iii) To consult the panel regularly on important local issues; and
 - (iv) To discover what are the community priorities for future Council activities.
- 2.3 This report details the results for the Viewpoint questionnaire, which was distributed in April 2006 to all active panel members. A response rate of 70.9% (864 completed questionnaires) was achieved.
- 2.4 The April 2006 (number 19) Viewpoint Survey also included questions on the internet and you, preparing for emergencies and community strategy.

3. SURVEY RESULTS

- 3.1 The Viewpoint survey included eight questions relating to Foster Caring, the results of which are attached as **Appendix A** to this Report.
- 3.2 The vast majority of respondents were not aware of how to become a foster carer and what help, training and support there was for carers.
- 3.3 Less than a quarter of respondents around April 2006 had seen or heard advertising, information or articles relating to foster caring. Of these 195 respondents over half had seen or heard of foster caring through the local newspaper and television.
- 3.4 Articles in the local magazines and newspapers, leaflets through doors and posters around Hartlepool seemed to be the most likely way for foster caring to be broadcast to those respondents of the Viewpoint survey. Although just under half of respondents thought that Hartbeat, local radio and the Council's internet site might also be successful mediums.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That Members consider the issues raised in the Viewpoint survey carried out in April 2006.

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

There were no background papers referred to in the preparation of this report.

Foster Caring

The Children's Services Department of Hartlepool Borough Council would like to know what people think about foster caring. They would also like to know where you have seen recent advertising about foster caring and where you think it would be better to see information on foster caring. They would like to find out your views on what you think would encourage people to be foster carers and what would put them off.

If you would like any further information on this topic please contact Rebecca Thomas on (01429) 523735 or via e-mail rebecca.thomas@hartlepool.gov.uk

17. Please say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. (PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ON EACH LINE)

	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	No answer %
Foster carers receive a good level of financial support	10.3	23.7	14	2.4	0.4	45	4
If you want to be a foster carer you'd be better off with an independent foster agency rather than the local authority	1.1	3.4	24.6	11.5	2	52.8	4.7
Foster carers don't get much training, support or breaks from the children they care for	1.1	7.9	16.7	12.2	2.1	55.4	4.7
Foster carers are needed for older children and young teenagers	12.3	49.6	7.3	1.7	0.6	23.9	4.7
Foster care allowances don't affect benefit payments	2.4	9.4	10.8	0.9	0.3	71.3	4.9
You can combine being a foster carer with looking after your own children	10.3	57.5	6.6	1.6	0.4	18.8	4.7
It is extremely difficult and very time consuming to be approved as a foster carer	3.6	21.8	16	4.1	0.5	48.9	5.1
Older people can make very good foster carers.	10.4	47.2	15.4	2.7	0.3	19.8	4.3
Hartlepool Borough Council is a fostering agency and recruits foster carers	4	23.6	10.8	0.4	0.3	55.9	5

18. Have you seen or heard any recent advertising, information or articles about foster care? (PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY)

Yes	22.5%	Go to Q19
No	71.3%	Go to Q20
Don't know	2.8%	Go to Q20
No answer	3.4%	

19. If yes, would you please describe it in the box below. (Those who have seen or heard recent advertising information or articles about "Foster Care") (N = 270)

Local newspaper	36.3%	National newspapers	2.9%
Television	20.3%	Newspaper advertisement with photo and description of a child	2.8%
No answer	15.6%	Other	5.3%
Poster/billboards	14.9%		
Local radio	10%		
On buses	3.1%		

20. Where do you think you would be likely to notice adverts or information for foster care? (PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

a. Articles or features in local newspaper and magazines?	74.7%
b. The Council Magazine	46.5%
c. Local radio (e.g. Radio Cleveland and Hartlepool fm)	46.8%
d. Hartlepool Borough Council's internet site	40.7%
e. Adverts on the back of pay and display tickets in the town	26.6%
f. A display in the Civic Centre reception area	30.1%
g. Posters displayed around Hartlepool	50.6%
h. Adverts in the jobs pages of local papers	35.6%
i. A stall at local events (e.g. Hartlepool Show, Maritime Festival)	38.7%
j. A leaflet through your door	51.1%
k. Leaflets available in public places around the town (e.g. Libraries)	40.9%
l. A stand in the local supermarkets	29.3%
m. In a school based newsletter or publication	20.7%
n. A calendar or wallplanner	13.9%
o. None of the above	0.5%
p. Don't know	7.6%
q. Other (please specify_____)	0.6%
GP Surgeries	0.4%
Television	2.1%
Buses	0.4%

21. Have you ever thought about being a foster carer?

a. I am currently or have been a foster carer	1.5%
b. I have given serious thought to being a foster carer	2%
c. I have given some thought to being a foster carer	6%
d. Being a foster carer might be an option for me in the future	9.8%
e. I would be unlikely to consider being a foster carer	48.4%
f. I would never want to be a foster care	24.6%
No answer	7.7%

22. To help us understand your reasons could you please explain what, if anything, you think would be the good things about being a foster carer?

None/no answer	66.8%
To help a child/give a child a better life	16.6%
Rewarding for foster parent	6.7%
Provides a safe environment/stability	6.3%
Am a caring person	2.5%
Other	1.6%
Financial stability	1%
Lots of free time available	0.8%
Would give you children if you've not had any	0.7%

23. What are the things that put you off being a foster carer?

None/no answer	41%	Lack of room in property	2.5%
Too old	17.7%	Don't like/want children	2%
Lack of time/too many other commitments/current family situation	16.3%	The cost	1.6%
Could get disruptive/problem children	7.7%	Lack of support/guidance	1.5%
Too much responsibility	5%	Risk of becoming emotionally involved	1.3%
Worried about effect on own family	4%	Want to have own family	0.9%
Poor health	2.9%	Not emotionally strong enough	0.5%
Dealing with natural parents	2.5%	Other	1.3%

24. If you would like us to send you any further information about becoming a foster carer, please tick this box:

Yes – please send me more information about becoming a foster carer 5.9%
(N = 71)

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

23 October 2008



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO HARTLEPOOL
BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE SERVICE –
FEEDBACK FROM SITE VISIT – COVERING
REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To facilitate a discussion amongst Members of this Forum in relation to feedback received as a result of the Site Visit to Darlington Borough Council.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 As part of the evidence gathering process for the undertaking of the inquiry into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service, a site visit to Darlington Borough Council was held on 9 October 2008 to gather evidence from another local authority on their provision of a Foster Care Service. Written evidence gathered from this site visit is attached to this report as **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 In line with good practice, Members of this Forum who were in attendance are requested to share / discuss their findings at today's meeting.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum note the content of this report and the written evidence from the site visit to Darlington Borough Council held on 9 October 2008 as detailed in Appendix A.
- 3.2 That Members of the Forum discuss their findings from the Site Visit as outlined in paragraph 2.1 of this report.

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

There were no background papers referred to in the preparation of this report.

APPENDIX A

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM – SITE VISIT TO
DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

9 October 2008

Notes

Present:

Councillors: Jane Shaw
Mary Fleet
Sheila Griffin

Officers: James Walsh, Scrutiny Support Officer

Also Present: Hilary Tillotson, Team Manager - Fostering, Darlington Borough Council

**Investigation into Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster
Care Service**

As part of the evidence gathering process, Members of the Forum visited the Darlington Borough Council.

The findings of Members of the Forum who undertook the visit were as follows:-

- Although Darlington Borough Council remunerates their Foster Carers at the same level as Hartlepool (in line with the Fostering Network minimum rate) the fee payment scheme is at a much lower level.
- Darlington Borough Council has specific problems recruiting Foster Carers for the older teenager, which is in line with national trends.
- Possibly due to the lower fee payment scheme in Darlington, they have recently lost one Foster Carer to an Independent Foster Agency.
- Training is an issue for Foster Carers in Darlington as the Council tries to fit sessions around working families. Remuneration of Foster Carers in Darlington has engendered a theory that the Council cannot be prescriptive about when training sessions are run, unlike the Independent Foster Agencies where Foster Caring, in financial terms, can be seen as a career.
- There are currently only three kinship carers at Darlington Borough Council.
- Family Group Conferencing is currently operating in Darlington after a very successful pilot. This has been one of the reasons for a reduction in kinship carer numbers.
- The ratio of Foster Carers to Support Workers is 15:1, although currently due to long-term sickness that ratio is 18:1.
- Darlington Borough Council hold three training sessions a year meaning that potentially new Foster Carers only have a potential maximum of four

APPENDIX A

months between expressing an interest in training and starting their foster care training.

- 35-38% of looked after children in Darlington are in the 0-4 age range.
- During 2007 Darlington Borough Council had 66 people registering an interest in becoming a foster carer; this resulted in a conversion rate of 9 fully trained foster carers. During the same period Darlington Borough Council lost 8 foster carers, due to a variety of reasons.
- Darlington Borough Council currently has a very stable team. Made up of one manager, one administrator, one support officer and four social workers.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

23 October 2008



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE PROVISION – EVIDENCE FROM HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARE STAFF

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider written evidence collated from the responses of staff from 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, at the time of writing this report, written evidence is being collated from staff working for the Authority's Foster Care Service, attached as **Appendix A** to this report and an open invitation offered to the staff to present their views to the Forum.
- 2.3 However, in accordance with the Authority's Access to Information Rules, it has not been possible to include the written evidence from members of staff working for Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service within the statutory requirements for despatch of the agenda and papers for this meeting. Arrangements have been made for the written evidence from Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Staff to be circulated under separate cover and in advance of this meeting.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum note the content of this report and the written evidence from staff working for the Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service, attached as **Appendix A** to this report.

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.

**Children's Services Scrutiny Forum's Investigation into
Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service**

Responses from staff who work for Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service.

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service?

Strengths

- Supervising social workers are dedicated.
- Well qualified and experienced staff.
- Thorough and rigorous assessment of prospective foster carers.
- Good level of support to approved carers.
- Post approval training of carers.
- Effective fostering panel who are committed to their task.
- Carers are able to progress through the Carers Progression Payment Scheme.

Weaknesses

- Little staff training for working with foster carers or for the carers.
- Lack of clear direction, support and staff supervision.
- Very few clear guidelines or procedures.

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

- Flexible working arrangements to meet the needs of the carers and staff.
- Staffing level increased to reflect the numbers of carers supported and the myriad of tasks carried out everyday.
- Systems in place to allow workers to be more efficient.
- Increased administrative support.

3. Do you have any thoughts about how Hartlepool might improve their recruitment and retention rate of Foster Carers?

- Have a team member responsible for co-ordinating training aspects.
- More training is needed for carers specific to caring for challenging behaviour, attachment, mental health issues.
- Training is being identified by staff and carers unfortunately funding is not available.
- Recruitment is on-going, linking with Hartlepool Mail and Hartbeat.
- Targeted recruitment is undertaken throughout the year e.g. advertising in mail supplements, back of parking tickets etc.
- Retention is not a problem. Very few carers leave to go to other agencies. Some carers have left independent agencies to come to us.
- Carers need support and sometimes staffing issues affect the service we are able to offer.

- It is not unusual for the team to be carrying vacancies (currently two posts filled by agency staff).

4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

- Staff work very hard and enjoy the work. We just don't feel valued.
- Cannot access ICS for our forms and case notes. This adds time as we have to record on carer's files and then add notes to the child's record on ICS.
- Aren't kept up to date on new developments in fostering.
- The fostering task has changed significantly over the past twenty years and carers are increasingly asked to deal with very challenging children. With the best will in the world this is very difficult and placement breakdown is not necessarily a failure on the carers part.
- To link in End of Placement Reports to the part where children are discharged from care or change placement. Would ensure receipt of evaluations as it is rare for social workers to complete them. It is essential that we get them back as the information continues to review etc and where they have been issues there is written evidence of this from the social worker.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

23 October 2008



Report of: Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION INTO
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER
CARE SERVICE -- DRAFT FINAL REPORT
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To facilitate a discussion from Members of the Forum about the recommendations they wish to include in the Forum's Draft Final Report on '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 Service.
- 2.2 Consequently Members will be aware that the Draft Final Report is due to be considered by this Forum at their meeting of 11 November 2008. In order to formulate conclusions and recommendations to be included in the Draft Final Report, Members are invited to present any conclusions or recommendations relating to the topic of 'Hartlepool Borough Council's Foster Care Service,' as a result of the evidence gathered by this Forum since the 21 July 2008.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum discuss conclusions and recommendations to be included in the Draft Final Report to be presented to Members at the meeting of this Forum on 11 November 2008.

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

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