

**COMMITTEE:** CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

**DATE:** 1ST JULY 2004

**SUBJECT:** FOSTERING

**REPORT BY:** JONATHAN WHALLEY

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**IMPLICATIONS:**

LEGAL	COMMUNITY SAFETY
EQUALITIES	ENVIRONMENT
FINANCIAL	CONSULTATIONS
STAFFING	OTHER

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

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**PURPOSE**

1. To inform the scrutiny panel of the impact and purpose of Luton's Fostering provisions.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2. Children's Services Scrutiny Panel are recommended to note the report

**REPORT**

3. Fostering in Luton continues to be a growing and thriving concern. Much emphasis has been placed on the further development of fostering services in order to meet the need to provide adequate and positive placements for children and young people who are required to live away from home. Stable, secure and enduring placements are seen as the cornerstone of quality care for looked after children and young people and in the majority of situations is the option of first choice when placements are required.

4. Luton's Fostering Service is a part of the Housing and Social Services Children and Families Division. The Family Placement Team is responsible for the recruitment, development and retention of carers in accordance with the needs of our looked after population. This team has a current force of 201 carers providing up to 330 placements for our children and young people.
5. Foster carers take many forms and deliver a variety of placement types in response to the variable needs that are presented. These placements, and the numbers of carers in each field are;

General Carers	118
Shared Carers	39 (providing respite care)
Kinship Carers	23 (providing care for family members)
Specific Carers	22 (approved to provide care for a specific child)

6. Luton's looked after population has shown an increase to a current total of 410. As demonstrated above, fostering options in Luton do not provide sufficient placements to meet this need. However, it should be noted that in many situations, fostering is not the preferred or required option for a child in public care. For example, many of these young people require stable residential placements or are returned to live at home while subject to Care Orders. It is agreed that work is continuously required to supplement our resource of carers, to train and equip them to provide high standards of care to vulnerable young people, and to retain their talents for the future. Despite these efforts, in every year a number of carers make the decision to cease fostering. The reasons for this are usually valid, and in the majority of cases are an agreed arrangement with the local authority. However, it is necessary to undertake continuous and relentless recruitment campaigns in order to ensure that our stock of carers is at a stable level.
7. One of the most significant factors to impact upon this effort is the development of services by Independent Fostering Agencies. IFA's are also a growing and increasing resource who are actively seeking to recruit carers. These IFA's are then able to "sell" their services to local authorities. In the most part these places are made available only to young people who's needs are such that it has not been possible to place them within our existing resources. These resources are expensive in comparison to our "in-house" provisions and as a result IFA's are in a position to reward carers with a higher rate of financial support. This attractive offer has in the past drawn carers away from local authority resources. The rates of allowance to foster carers is constantly under review and in line with similar authorities in this region. Luton participates in Regional Network meetings where such issues are discussed. It should

be made clear that Luton has in fact faced only minor loss of carers to IFA's in comparison to some authorities. This reflects on the quality of support made available to our carers. However, this remains a potential threat and the need to support and provide comparative allowances to our carers is a constant issue.

8. Having said this, recruitment in Luton has been so successful in the past year that it has proven difficult to undertake the assessments of new or potential carers quickly enough. The Family Placement Team has taken the following steps to increase recruitment;
  - (i) Appointed a recruitment officer – with the specific purpose of overseeing the advertising for, recruitment of and delivery of training to new carers.
  - (ii) Develop information evenings to members of the public to broaden the sharing of facts and data regarding the process and rewards related to fostering.
  - (iii) Engaged in Recruitment Fares – most recently and successfully in Luton.
  - (iv) Appointed at manager level a worker to undertake the recruitment of Contract Carers (see below)
  - (v) Spot purchasing of assessment work in order to process applicants through approval more swiftly.
9. Recent information suggests that for every 100 applicants to become foster carers, as few as between 8 to 10 are successful. Therefore, if we are to continue to keep ahead of demand and defend the numbers of carers against those who chose to leave this service, year on year the Family Placement Team must work through some 150 to 200 applicants. The process of this work is time consuming and detailed.

#### **Contract Foster Care & Treatment Foster Care:**

10. As a part of this authority's commitment to delivering quality local resources, work is currently underway to develop and deliver an advanced stream of foster care. These "intensive" placements are intended to provide local resources for those more difficult to place young people who have traditionally been placed outside the borough in expensive external resources. It is our intention to recruit between 8 and 10 Contract Carers in the next year to 18 months who will provide single placements with intensive and planned support packages. These placements are dependent upon a healthy multi-agency approach to care and work with

our partners in Life Long Learning and Health has been productive to this end. The appointment of an experienced Social Worker to oversee this work has seen healthy results in the early stages with high levels of response to our advertisements. However, as with general carers, the number of successful candidates from those who have expressed an interest will be a very small percentage, and much work is required to see this through to a successful and sustainable conclusion.

11. The local authority has also made an application for funding to develop a Treatment Foster Care Service. This service will provide intensive and therapeutic time limited support for children and young people who require high levels of intervention. A response to this bid will be made known in the next few weeks.

### **Summary:**

- Fostering in Luton is a vital part of the services to looked after children in our Borough.
  - Foster carers are a fluid and ever changing resource.
  - Foster care placements are running at an almost constant total capacity.
  - The number of Looked After Children and Young People has shown an increase in the recent past – placing an increased pressure on our fostering service.
  - The Family Placement Team have a duty to recruit and support some 201 carers – a task that is considerable and time consuming.
  - In order to meet the needs of our looked after population and reduce the numbers of children and young people requiring placements outside the Borough, the Family Placement Team and the Children's Services Division are seeking to develop two new streams of foster care provisions.
12. It is clear that growth in fostering services will require a growth in support networks and provisions to ensure that this is built on healthy foundations. Investment at this stage will ensure that placements offered to our young people are of high quality, reduce expenditure and provide stability and security to vulnerable children in our care.

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS** **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

13. There are no background papers relating to this report