

Fostering Service

Annual Report

April 2010 – March 2011



www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/fostering

Introduction

The fostering service delivers the Council's statutory functions under the Children Act 1989 and amended legislation and regulations in providing local family based care for children and young people who need to be looked after by Milton Keynes Council.

A family support ethos is well embedded into the culture of Children's Social Care to support children to remain with their families. The fostering service provides short term respite care to children with disabilities through the Family Link scheme and for those children on the edge of care the service provides support to families in crisis through the Support Care provision.



Where it is not possible for children to remain with their parents the fostering service undertake viability and family and friends assessments to enable the child to be cared for within their wider family networks. However for the majority of children entering the care system they are placed with foster carers and we strive to place children within our own fostering resource and as local as possible to Milton Keynes.

We aim to place children and young people in a caring environment where they will experience stability, security, where they are supported and encouraged to reach their full potential. Children are placed with carers who are supported through social work supervision, who have access to a comprehensive training programme, where peer and professional support are very much available and where they feel valued as part of the professional network that cares for the most vulnerable children in the community of Milton Keynes.

Purpose of the Service

The fostering service aims to recruit, train and assess those individuals who express a wish to become foster carers for Milton Keynes Council. Of equal importance is the retention of approved foster carers to meet the complex needs of the children of Milton Keynes placed in the care of the local authority and for these children to attain the very best outcomes in stable nurturing placements.

The Fostering Team

The fostering service has a committed, staff team who are passionate and driven to get the best outcomes for children in care. The team consists of:-

- 1 full time Team Manager
- 1 full time Deputy Manager
- 1 full time Recruitment and Retention Officer
- 1 Duty Officer (social work assistant)
- 2.4 Senior Social Work Practitioners
- 7.2 Social Workers
- 1.25 Social Work Assistants
- 2 Business Support Administrators (in partnership with Mouchel)

Children in Care

There has been a nationwide increase of the numbers of children and young people entering the care system during this review period. This experience has been mirrored in Milton Keynes.

On the 31st March 2011 the fostering service had 149 children in placement and had provided placements for a further 111 children throughout the year.

Age of Children placed on the 31st March 2011

Age bands	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-16 years	17+
	46	31	46	19	7

The most common age for children to become looked after by Milton Keynes Council is those aged between 0-4 years. However a significant proportion enter care in the 10-16 year age band.

Ethnicity and Gender of children placed on the 31st March 2011

Ethnicity	Female	Male
White British	60	50
Other White Background	1	1
White and Black Caribbean	4	3
White Asian	1	0
Other mixed Ethnic Group	1	3
Pakistani	0	1
Bangladeshi	1	2
Other Asian Background	1	7
African	4	5
Other Black Background	2	0
Other Ethnic Group	0	2
Total	75	74

There is no significant division between the gender balance of children placed. 75% of children placed were of a white British heritage and 25% of children had a black or minority ethnic heritage.

Sufficiency Duty

Under Section 22 (g) of the Children Act 1989 Local Authorities have a duty to ensure there is accommodation within their area for children in their care. This duty has been clarified and reinforced by the issue of statutory guidance on 'Sufficiency' issued in 2010.

To best meet the needs of children and match those with an appropriate placement Milton Keynes Council are required to have, and where necessary, commission sufficient resources to meet the need. Whilst it is our aim to place children who require foster care within the Milton Keynes fostering service due to capacity issues the service also commissions foster care provision from independent fostering agencies.



The use of independent foster agencies has steadily decreased from 33% of foster placements in 2008, to 26.2% in 2011. The Milton Keynes fostering service looks after **73.8%** of all those children and young people placed in foster care.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The fostering service continues to welcome enquiries from individuals who are interested in fostering, regardless of age, marital status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disability. The fundamental issue is whether prospective foster carers will be able to meet the complex needs of a child in care.

The implementation of our recruitment strategy has resulted in an increase in the number of initial enquiries from the public and a timely social work response has shown an increase in applications. During this period 28 fostering households became approved foster carers giving a net increase of 16 sets of foster carers. This has enabled an increased capacity to place children within the service provision and has provided improved matching opportunities when placing children within a foster family.

Number of foster carer enquiries:

➤ March 2009	=	112 foster carer enquiries
➤ March 2010	=	168 foster carer enquires
➤ March 2011	=	170 foster carer enquiries

Numbers of approved fostering households for Milton Keynes Council:

➤ March 2009	=	111 approved households
➤ March 2010	=	118 approved households
➤ March 2011	=	134 approved households

Ethnicity of foster carers as at 31st March 2011

White British	102	(76%)
White British & White Irish	3	(2%)
White British & Other white background	4	(3%)
White/Black Caribbean	4	(3%)
White British & Indian	1	(0.7%)
White British & Black African	2	(1.6%)
White British & Chinese	1	(0.7%)
White Irish	1	(0.7%)
Pakistani	5	(4%)
Indian	1	(0.7%)
Bangladeshi	1	(0.7%)
Other Asian	2	(1.6%)
Caribbean	2	(1.6%)
African	4	(3%)
Other Black	1	(0.7%)
Total	134	

The fostering service has 81% of foster carers who are from a white British background and 19% are from a black and ethnic minority background. Whilst we have increased the number of foster carers from a black or minority ethnic background from 17 to 25, the service will continue to recruit to better match the 25% of children in placement from a black or minority ethnic background.

Placement Stability

Stable, consistent placements offer the child in care a trusting, predictable environment where they feel safe and valued. The fostering staff and our professional colleagues work alongside foster carers to maintain children in placement in order that these children experience few changes and are best placed to develop and thrive.

During this review period we have successfully placed 2 children into a permanent arrangement and have secured 6 Special Guardianship orders, thus taking these children out of the care system.

National Indicators

NI063 – Children placed in care for more than 2.5 years and have been in the same placement for 2 years.

NI062 – Children placed in care that have experienced 3 or more placement moves (within the year).

Data as at 31/03/2011	National Average	Milton Keynes Council	Milton Keynes Fostering Service
Number of children in foster care		202	149
NI063	68%	59.3%	66%
NI062	12%	12.2%	9.2%

These figures highlight how children and young people placed within our resource experience fewer placement moves and longer placement stability.

Retention of Foster Carers

The retention of experienced and skilled foster carers is a key factor in delivering a high quality service to the children and families of Milton Keynes. All foster carers have an allocated fostering worker who offers regular supervision and guidance to assist the carer in executing all facets of the fostering task.

Foster carers also access further professional support via the Children in Care Education Support team for all matters relating to and supporting the child's education. A dedicated Primary Mental Health Worker for Children in Care is available and accessible to provide immediate and planned work to support foster carers in understanding and meeting the complex needs of children in their care.

Foster carers have the opportunity to access Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) support, either by a phone call, a 1:1 meeting or participation within a monthly support group. This service is key in assisting carers to understand the causes for some of the challenging behaviour the children in their care display. It also equips foster carers with strategies for managing the behaviours and space to discuss the impact fostering has on them and their families.

Informal peer support is offered and accessed via the monthly Coffee Mornings where the numbers attending continue to grow. Fostering Forum where carers are consulted and participate in service development is an integral part of the Fostering calendar and quarterly newsletters inform all foster carers of the matters discussed.

During this period a Mentoring Scheme has become established which links those newly approved foster carers to experienced, knowledgeable foster carer mentors. The service has 5

mentors and the aim of the scheme is to offer another dimension to the support provided to fostering families in those early days post approval.

Our foster carers not only deliver a caring, nurturing and aspirational placement to children in their care but they also work with parents, extended family and the professional team to enable the child to achieve and attain their potential. In recognition of the variety of work our foster carers undertake and the very real difference they make to children's lives we hold an annual Awards Evening in May where foster carers are presented with certificates of achievement and crystal in acknowledgement and appreciation for their contribution in making a difference.



Children that Foster – Fostering4MK

The philosophy that 'every child matters' is very much embraced by the fostering service. We recognise that the sons and daughters of foster carers play a significant role in the fostering task and good relationships help to maintain placement stability.

The support group Fostering4MK (a name chosen by the group) has become well established during the past year. With a regular core group of attendees the children report that they enjoy the space to be with other children who foster. The group have just produced a DVD about their experiences of fostering and will be used as a training tool for those going through the fostering assessment process.

Family and Friend Foster Carers

It is well evidenced that children placed within their own family enjoy more placement stability and are more likely to attain better outcomes. Milton Keynes Council always strives to keep children in their birth family network where possible.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, Regulation 38, also allows a child or young person to be placed in an immediate or emergency situation with a friend or a family member. The fostering service undertakes initial viability assessments when considering placing a child or young person with a family member or a friend.

These assessments are complex pieces of work, as one has to achieve the balance between reinforcing their identity, by keeping a child within their extended family and the robust requirements as laid down by Fostering Regulations.

A social worker within the fostering team has taken a lead officer role in undertaking viability and family and friends assessments and as such, has developed an excellent knowledge and expertise in this complex area of work.

During 2010-2011 the fostering service undertook 48 (28 in 2009-2010) family and friends viability assessments and subsequent court statements. The team have also completed 6 Regulation 38 assessments ensuring that 8 children and young people were placed within their family network.

Costs

The total budget for 2010 – 2011 was **£2, 550.598**; the final spend showed an overspend of £240,000.

As more children enter the care system and we continue to increase the pool of 'in house' foster carers an increase in budget through the budget build is required for 2012-2013. We also look for savings to be made by reducing the use of external placements.

The average cost of the placement for a child in the Milton Keynes Council foster care is **£426** per week.

The average cost of a placement for a child placed in an Independent Fostering Agency is £896 per week.



Foster Carer Training

Having a knowledgeable and skilled cohort of foster carers is essential to meet the needs of the children in care. The numbers of foster carers accessing training continues to grow year on year. Core training for the first year following approval ensures foster carers attain the key skills and knowledge from which to launch them into the foster carer role.

Foster carers are offered a comprehensive training programme to assist them in their professional development and to gain the necessary knowledge and understanding the role demands.

During this period the service ran Fostering Changes training, a twelve week course devised by the Maudsley Hospital and Kings College. The course is underpinned by a theoretical foundation of social learning and attachment theory. Attaining good educational outcomes for children in care was a key subject that ran throughout the course. The course equipped foster carers with techniques which had a direct impact on children's behaviour and placement stability.

To aid foster carers in completing the Children's Workforce Development Council Induction Standards (CWDC) within the specified time scales a rolling monthly programme of training workshops have been provided over this period and will continue to assist new carers in meeting the requirement.

Foster Carer Engagement

During this period a comprehensive Foster Carer questionnaire was sent to all fostering households to ascertain the foster carers experience of fostering for Milton Keynes Council and to highlight areas for development of the service. In general the feedback was very positive, particularly from the service received from the fostering team. A small number of actions were identified as service improvements, such as the service not using so much paper. To this end the service has been developing a secure, password protected website where all fostering information will be available to be accessed by the foster carers and will become available in the summer of 2011.

A similar questionnaire was also sent out to the sons and daughters of foster carers to establish their views on the service. Again the children gave generally very positive views however they did express how sharing their home and their parents is at times quite difficult to manage and they felt sad when children moved on. An action plan is in place to offer children that foster specific training and workshops.

Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel was convened 14 times during 2010-2011. Fostering Panel hears and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on the following:

- All fostering applications
- Foster Carers annual household reviews
- Recommendation for change of approval
- Reports when there have been significant issues in the foster home, including complaints/allegations.
- Contested terminations of approval
- Permanency matches

Prospective foster carers and approved foster carers/supported lodgings carers are encouraged to attend panel and are given the opportunity to comment on their experience via the Fostering Panel feedback forms. The feedback is used by panel members to review practice.

Fostering Panel also has a quality assurance role in relation to child care and fostering practices. In this capacity high praise has been afforded to the quality and comprehensive assessments placed before it.

Panel Membership

Milton Keynes Fostering Panel is regulation compliant in accordance with National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.

The Independent Fostering Panel Chair is Claire Samson. Claire provides the panel with experience, knowledge and skills in her role as she has chaired Adoption & Permanency Panels and Fostering Panels for many years. Fostering Panel membership on the 31st March 2011:

Sheila Mulvenney	Manager in Care Education Team
Tina Douglas	Children's Rights Manager Barnardos
Aysha Badeanu	Special Guardianship Social Worker
Kevin Martin	Foster Carer from Bedfordshire
Juliet Cleverdon	Foster Carer from Buckinghamshire
Marie-Jo Pace-Maund	Team Manager, Options for Independence Team
Mandy Lane	Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children
Christine Zealley	Elected Member of Milton Keynes Council

Jane Partridge, Fostering Team manager is the Panel Adviser and is a non voting member.



Panel Business

Total number of cases presented to Fostering Panel

FOSTERING PANEL 1st April 2010 - 31st March 2011	Number
Approval of mainstream foster carers	22
Family and Friends - Regulation 38 Assessments	6
Approval of Supported Lodgings carers	2
Foster Household review/Updates/Change of approval - presented	65
Recommendation for proposal of child to be placed permanently with specific foster carers (match)	2
Deferment	7
Termination of Approval of Foster Carers	12
TOTAL	116

Reasons for the termination of approval

Category of Termination	Number
Order Granted on Child in Placement ie Special Guardianship Order/Adoption	4
Family & Friends Carers – Placement Ended	4
Resigned from Fostering	4
Total	12

All foster carers who cease fostering are offered an exit interview and their feedback observations used to inform the service and practice.

Report from Fostering Panel chair – Claire Samson

This has been another busy year for Panel and panel members continue to be impressed with the volume and quality of work presented. Panel members always value the opportunity to meet foster carers and prospective carers and this year were also delighted to welcome a number of children and young people to panel.

This year has seen a marked increase in the feedback obtained from children and young people, social workers and independent reviewing officers identifying the skills and commitment of foster carers in Milton Keynes. In addition Panel consistently receive positive feedback from carers about the range of useful support, supervision and training they receive from a group of committed and experienced staff.

There have been some changes in membership over the year and panel continues to be a diverse group with a wide range of experience and expertise and a strong commitment to their role. Panel members work well together and carers give positive feedback about the welcoming

atmosphere which enables them to participate in discussion. Panel continues to use feedback to make improvements in the operation of panel.

Next year will present challenges for panel in implementing the new Minimum Standards, Regulations and Guidance. The changes include greater flexibility for panel membership and quoracy which will have a positive impact on managing panel business in order to respond to the needs of children in Milton Keynes.

Fostering Service Summary of Achievements 2010-2011

- Robust recruitment and retention of foster carers
- Increased the number of foster carers from 118 to 134
- Increased foster carers from a BME background from 17 to 25
- Increased capacity to place children within the fostering service
- Increased capacity to culturally match children
- Provided foster placements to 260 children and young people

- 6 children subject to Special Guardianship Orders
- Low percentage of children experiencing 3+ placement moves
- Mentoring Scheme for newly approved foster carers
- Delivered a 12 week Fostering Changes Course
- Foster carers views sought via questionnaire re service delivery
- Sons and daughters of foster carers views sought via questionnaire
- Produced DVD from Fostering4MK for training

Summary

During this review period the capacity to better match the needs of children requiring foster care has improved. Through a robust recruitment and retention policy the service has delivered a net increase of 16 foster carers (13.5%) and maintained the skills of experienced foster carers.

We very much recognise that the often, life changing experience of becoming a foster carer requires additional support. We now offer these foster carers another dimension of assistance and encouragement via the newly operational Mentoring Scheme.

By actively seeking the views of our foster carers and their children we are able to identify what we do well and actions to continually improve the service in order that the retention of foster carers remains high. The high retention of committed foster carers offers the children of Milton Keynes stable and secure placements where their needs are met by knowledgeable, skilled local foster carers and where children achieve to their potential.

Fostering Service Development 2011-2012

Foster Carers Web Site – The service has been working closely with the IT department to create a password protected website for specific interactive use by Milton Keynes foster carers. Once completed this website will offer foster carers access to all policies, procedures, paperwork, the foster carers handbook, information about current leisure activities, up and coming foster carer events etc, etc. It will be a comprehensive data information tool that whilst giving our foster carers easy access to all fostering information will also produce a saving of approximately £8,000 on printing costs.

National Minimum Standards, Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011

From the 1st April 2011 the new Standards, Regulations and Guidance will come into force. This will prove a significant challenge to the service as all areas of the service will need to be

reviewed to ensure compliance. The new Standards have already been mapped against the current policies and practices and an action plan is in place to execute conformity.

Delegated Authority – The new Standards and Care Planning introduces the practice of delegated authority to foster carers. The Government is clear that foster carers should be authorised to make everyday decisions about their fostered child wherever possible. This will support placement planning and placement stability. The challenge in this particular area will be to deliver training to the child care team and foster carers and ensure its inclusion in placement planning. A foster carer and staff training conference will be held on 12 October 2011 to meet this challenge.

Family and Friends – The new Standards and Guidance requires all Local Authorities to have a Family and Friends Policy in place by September 2011. A task and finish group has been formed to ensure that MK is compliant with the requirement within time scale.

Short Breaks - The new Standards and Guidance set out new banding in respect of how children access these services. These range from informal arrangements through to children receiving the service via Sec 20 (CA89). A revised policy on short breaks will be required.

Electronic Recording – The current practice for recording a child's development through the placement by the foster carer is not held electronically. Foster carer records hold vital 'life story' information for the child. The service is working with the IT department to develop a means by which all recording is completed electronically and sent to the child care worker to be held on the child's file. This area of development is ongoing with plans to be fully functional within the coming year.

ICS – The Fostering Service will begin using the Integrated Children's System to process and store foster carer information and service business.

Jane Partridge
Team Manager
Fostering Service

Appendix 1

Recruitment & Retention Activity 2010 - 2011	
April 2010	Quarterly Newsletter Carers Coffee morning
May	Fostering Fortnight – MK News editorial, 2 Drop in evenings, display in MK Library, radio interview, MK Website advert re information evenings held locally. Annual Awards evening Carers Coffee morning
June	Quarterly News letter. Carers Coffee morning Teen Turnaround advert in MK News Distribution of posters to doctors surgeries
July	General Fostering advert Foster Fun day Quarterly Newsletter Carers Coffee morning
Aug	Advertising in MK Library Carers Coffee morning
Sep	Foster Forum Carers Coffee morning Advert in MK News for short break carers
Oct	Quarterly Newsletter Carers Coffee morning General fostering advert in MK News Information evening to be held locally
Nov	Advert in MK News for teen turnaround carers Carers Coffee morning
Dec	Christmas cards and calendars to carers. Carers Coffee morning
Jan 2011	Advert re Tier 3 carers in MK News. Advert for general fostering in MK News. Quarterly Newsletter Carers Coffee morning
Feb	Information evening to be held locally General fostering advert in MK News Carers Coffee morning
Mar	General fostering advert in MK News

*The above excludes our daily advertising on a MK roundabout and the MKTV advertising in the Civic Building.

*Red type = Retention activity (excluding training events etc)

www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/fostering



Available in audio, large print,
Braille and other languages
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