
Meeting title: Fostering Liaison Advisory Group [FLAG]
Date and time: 7pm, Monday 12th July 2021
Location: Via Microsoft TEAMS

In attendance: Sophie Eadsforth (temporary Chair for the meeting, Group Manager), Ty Yousaf (Fostering Service manager), Jill McLaughlin (IRO), Laura Webster (FIRO) & Prue Oakden (Fostering Support Officer & temporary minute taker)
Apologies received from Steve Edwards (Corporate Director) & Cllr Tracey Taylor
8 fostering households were in attendance

1. Update from Ty Yousaf, Fostering Service Manager. Lucy Andrewartha is on maternity leave and Rachel Taylor-Murray has taken the secondment to cover the Central and Short Breaks team manager role while Lucy is off. Hugo Walters has joined the panel manager team in a temporary part time post which will end in December.
2. The annual fostering report has been sent to committee and 55 new carers have been approved in the last financial year. After the resignations, retirements and family and friend's carers getting SGOs, we have a total of 15 additional carers in the service. We are keen to continue recruiting more carers to support the service and we are continuing to invest in the recruitment process. Also, we have been able to pay a "thank you" payment to those carers with placements during April 2020 – March 2021 to recognise their efforts and hard work during the lockdown period. We are also working hard to get the hubs set up as we come out of lockdown. The therapeutic training roll-out is going well and the feedback has been positive.
3. Rachel Cutts raised a training need for carers to be informed of the education system in relation to looked after children i.e what are they entitled to, pupil premium, what else can they access, virtual school? Better understanding would empower foster carers to better support and advocate on behalf of their looked after child in the school arena.
Action – Sophie to invite Sue Denholm to the next FLAG meeting to give an overview on the issue of the education system and to give advice re advocating for the child in their care.
4. A newly approved carer wished to inform the meeting that she has found the period after approval quite isolating. She has a good SSW who has been supportive but due to confidentiality aspects of fostering she is not able to discuss things with friends and family so she has felt quite alone. Covid has impacted on this as meetings that might normally take place in person have had to be done online which doesn't help to build relationships. She felt that being linked to an experienced carer that she could speak with freely would have alleviated some of the confusion with paperwork and isolation that she has felt, as well as being introduced with other newly approved carers that she can build relationships with and share experiences.
Action – Ty to look at the process for newly approved carers with team managers and see what teams do in terms of "buddying up" new carers. Create a policy to ensure this is done for each new fostering household.
5. Jill (IRO) asked how carers are feeling about the prospect of going back to real life meetings when lockdown ends. The response was mixed as some people feel it is easier having meetings via TEAMS due to less time spent travelling/travel costs and the ease of not needing childcare if you can stay at home and join a meeting. Others felt it was difficult

meeting people virtually as you cannot read body language through a screen. Every single household is different, and it the changes will impact families differently. The IRO team are discussing this regularly and as the meetings are for the foster families it may be that they can take those families situations into consideration before booking either a virtual or real meeting.

6. The NCC offices are being redeveloped to provide fewer desks but more meeting rooms, so teams can come in should they need to but meeting rooms will have large screens so that for those that are working from home can dial into the meetings remotely.
7. Rachel Cutts asked if prospective adopters are informed of the role of the foster carer during their training as they have had mixed experiences when a child is moved on from foster care to adoption. Sometimes the adopters are very appreciative of them and sometimes they seem to feel threatened.
Action – Sophie to speak with adoption manager Shelagh Mitchel to share this feedback re adopters.
8. Jill asked if there is a standard procedure for foster carers putting money into a bank account for looked after children as it seems to happen consistently with IFA placements but not always for LA placements. Rachel Cutts explained that with long term placements it is easy to save up money and have an account for any birthday/Christmas money that a child is gifted and then bank statements can be given to new carers when children move on but with short term placements it is difficult to set up accounts and to accumulate money. The policy may sit with the children's service rather than the fostering service.
Action – Sophie to ask Matt Wesson/Rachel Stimson about this, the response can be shared in the Fostering News bulletin.
9. Ty asked on behalf of Jayne Ripley if FLAG would be in a position to finance some hub activities and asked for his own learning for further information about how FLAG funding works. Tracey Jervis explained that historically the district teams had their own support groups and FLAG would fund them £250 each to spend on various parties and experiences as they wished but with the general proviso that they would attend and engage with FLAG. The North team had a Bassetlaw Fostering Association that had a bank account with two signatories for the funds which they would then agree how to spend the money. It went on things like Easter Egg Hunts, Christmas parties, a trip to Sundown Adventureland etc.
Action – Ty to speak to Sam Smith in Accounts to find out more about FLAG funding for future distribution to support groups/hubs.

Next Meeting -

4th October 7pm via Microsoft teams

Link will be shared in the Fostering News email bulletin