Fostering Advisory Partnership

Meeting on the 9th February 2018 @ South Green Park, Mattishall.
10 am Start.

Present: Julia Spinks (chair) Sally Sinclare (Vice Chair), Pam Weyer, Mike Woodward, Theresa Lavery, Keeley White, Ali Utting, Francis Whymark, Craig Secker, Sarah Cressey, Debbie Burrell, Lori Ong, Owen Garrod, Anne Ritchie, Sharon Donoghue.

Apologies: Roni Kingston-Miles, Stefan Rice, Peter Ronan, Sarah Hunter.

1. **Welcome and Introductions.** Welcome to Ali who is our representative from Health this month. Craig declared an interest, he owns Insignia Healthcare but this company does not do any work for Children’s Services. Francis declared that he is now a Foster Carer as well as a Supervising Social Worker.

2. **Action points:**

   **Permanence Panels** - Sally to chase the distribution of the letter which advises staff and carers that carers will be able to attend a Permanence Panel once a month, if they wish to. This should be happening from January 2018.

   **SGO** – Mike has found a useful leaflet which details what an SGO is and can be used for parents, staff and children. He has sent this by email to Sharon and to Managers for their information. Here is the link: [https://www.frg.org.uk/images/Advice_Sheets/20-special-guardianship-for-birth-parents.pdf](https://www.frg.org.uk/images/Advice_Sheets/20-special-guardianship-for-birth-parents.pdf) Sharon agreed that the leaflet is informative and will share with the rest of the group. This can be printed off and given to parents or they can look online themselves.

   Carers are experiencing problems with what to write on the support plan and in particular with regards to understanding the no detriment offer. Julia has spoken with these carers direct and has kindly volunteered to organise a session to help those carers who would like some guidance with this. There is also an information session in April for foster carers regarding “no detriment” at Dereham FC, further details will follow.

   There is some misunderstanding with carers, and workers about “no detriment offer”, with regards to what can be included or not.

PG1
There are concerns that this process is very slow and it seems that only 1 case has been approved since last May with over 100 cases waiting. We are concerned also that no one person or department is responsible for overseeing, monitoring and tracking of these cases, which can cause delays, complications and confusion. There have been instances where a Child’s Social Worker and IRO were not aware of SGO and no detriment offer which is concerning.

Mike advised that a meeting with the Director of Children’s Services took place this week and Sara said the current situation is unacceptable. A further meeting will take place and will look at the concerns Mike raised. **SGO on next month’s Agenda to see if progress has been made.**

**Sally will ensure the SGO and no detriment offer information will be resent to all workers.** Note, that with regards to “leaving care service” a child with SGO can decide for themselves if they want a Personal Assistant or not.

### 3. Key Issues:

#### Independent Visitor Service – Action for Children:

The service is available for children do not have regular contact with birth families and gives the child a positive role model whom they can trust and can take them out of the fostering home, and by there to listen to any concerns they have. There are two carers in FAP who use the service and the children and carers find the service invaluable. If the service was removed they would find this devastating.

It has been brought to our attention that Action for Children will no longer hold the contract for this service and we are concerned about how this might impact on the children. We are also concerned that the services users were not consulted about this change and not given the opportunity to express their views on the quality of the current providers, which we feel is excellent. We are concerned for the staff at Action for Children and if the current IV’s will remain and the effect any changes might have on our children.

**Keeley will speak with Carey Cake (IRO Service) to find out more details and feedback to the group.**

#### Term Time Holidays

Carers have expressed their concerns over the consistency of whether a term time holiday is agreed or not. Keeley advised that the DFE’s position is that children should not be taken out of school during term time. However the decision sits with the Head Teacher. Children’s Services position is the same as DFE.

The Head Teacher might approve term time holidays in exceptional circumstances for example a family bereavement where travel abroad is necessary. The extortionate cost of the holidays during school holiday is not an ‘exceptional circumstance’. The child’s learning is always central to any decision.

Francis added that if a child is taken out of school for two weeks a year, by the time they have finished school they will have lost one whole year of learning and most of the children in foster care have already missed a vast amount of learning before entered the care system.
**Retired Foster Carers**

A carer brought a case forward where a lady had recently retired and did not receive a card or any acknowledgment from Fostering. There is no set system in place but each fostering manager will know who is leaving the service and what the reasons are for this. Usually a personalised letter is given which would thank the carer for their service etc. It appears that this has been missed in this case a Fostering Manager has been sick since Christmas and this will now be followed up by another Manager.

Carers find it sad and felt that there should be some kind of formal recognition to make the carers feel special and appreciated, especially those who have given many years to fostering. A gift or flowers, together with some kind of presentation should be the expectation.

One carer said she has a relative who is a retired social worker and she gets invited to an annual dinner paid for by Norfolk County Council, where they can get information on pensions and other support. Sally said that she doubted such an event is funded by Children’s Services. As a group FAP would like to set something up for retiring carers to value their services to Fostering.

*Sharon to put our recommendation forward by email to Peter.*

**Support for children of carers:**

There is a group that has been set up for some time for children of carers which has an activity and support element. Activities such as Quasar or Bowling take place and then discussions follow to support the children with any issues they are having. This group meets during the school holidays. The group feels that it should be open to the fostering family which should include grandchildren who regularly visit the fostering home. Fostering Friends to advertise this development.

A list of children attending should be given out to carers so that other children can see if other children they know are going.

For birth children who need additional support or some kind of therapy because they may have experienced a traumatic event as a direct result of the role of fostering, then counselling can be arranged. If birth children need help, discussions should take place with the Supervising Social Worker and the fostering family and a best course of action agreed. Supervising Social Workers should be encouraged to spend time with fostering children to ensure that they feel fully supported.

**Moving on:**

When a child leaves a fostering household due to Adoption a very clear plan is established and reviews are carried out to ensure that all is going to plan with the bridging. Likewise a plan for contact following Adoption, is set at the placement planning meeting, and during the transition there is no set goodbye day as contact is staggered. This is all dependant on the needs of the child. However when a child moves on to another carer or to birth family these firms arrangements are not made. The child and carers will almost certainly suffer some kind of grieving period and if the issue of contact is not addressed correctly this could potentially lead to problems in the future.

Pg3
Where there are placement breakdowns, the carer feels guilty and not being able to see the child or have any type of contact for whatever the reason compounds the guilt.

In the recent government Stocktake page 92 it states:

“31. When children move placement they should routinely be consulted about the adults and children who are important to them and, unless it is not in their interests, contact with those adults and children should be encouraged and facilitated.”

Ideally we would like a system similar to that used in Adoption with an agreed plan in place, if the child wants this.

4. Support Groups:
   - **Kings Lynn** – Ian Wright from LADO attended and was very informative. 8 Carers attended.
   - **Norwich** – Was attended by 4 carers, more would have attended if a course wasn’t happening on the same day. The Benjamin Foundation attended which carers found useful and lots of questions were asked.
   - **Gr Yarmouth** – 5 attended, a Supervising Social Worker attended and talked about the course Therapeutic Life Story Work by Richard Rose.
   - **Watton** - The group was quieter this time, only 6 carers but two carers that would of attended were unable to make it this time. Anna Kay, a specialist Public Health Nurse was the guest speaker. She gave out lots of information.

5. **TAC/CPD/CWD** - no meetings have been held since the last FAP meeting. The next CPD meeting is 26/2 and the draft programme for 2018-19 will be looked at.

6. **AOB** –
   - **Children in care day** – this event has been cancelled due to low numbers. Debbie added a post to fostering friends to ask why carers/children had not taken up this opportunity. As it was half term many children had contact, the venue was in the center of Norwich which is not always an easy place to get to especially for those who have to travel a long way. Some younger children were put out that they could not use the climbing wall like their older siblings could, and would have attended if it was open to younger children too. Young people of 16-17 also wanted to attend.
     Future events should be for all ages with lots of notice so it can be planned for. The In-Care Council could organise future events. There are In-Care Councils in 6 locations across Norfolk; Sally will advise Pam which is the nearest to her.

   - **Time off Fostering** – Carers can take time off Fostering for a variety of reasons such as adopting a child who has previously been fostered by them. If registration has ceased then a fostering assessment will need to be completed, but as there will be existing records this process will be much quicker than the initial fostering assessment. If registration has not ceased then the carer should still have a Supervising Social Worker and the process will be much quicker and simpler.

PG4
Forms for new placements – carers have mentioned that they do not always receive a medical card or form. Sally said that cards are no longer used but it is imperative that medical forms are supplied at the start of each placement. Carers on the Stepping Stones Course said that they are now provided with much more information than in previous years from the Supervising Social Worker but not from the Children’s Social Worker. Sally is concerned by this and will raise this with the Heads of Social Work and remind all social workers that a pack is available when a child is accommodated, which has a checklist in it. Sally will ask Business Support to send the checklist to nfsduty@norfolk.gov.uk so that it can be sent to carers and Supervising Social Workers. Sharon to add this to Agenda for next month.

Learning Hub – Some carers are experiencing problems in accessing the learning hub and booking courses. Theresa will add the link to the Hub.

Teenage Brain – this course is being run by two Social Workers, Travis Britton and Jack Sinclair. It is run on a Friday morning at Carrow House and there are 10 sessions. There is a mixture of adults; parents, SGO’s and it is being opened to foster carers. Sally to send Teenage Brain Course information to Sharon to forward on to carers.

Stocktake – the recently published Stocktake has been distributed to carers. There are some controversial recommendations which should be discussed in further depth and the views of carers sought. Julia will set up a meeting with carers to find out what they think of the proposals.

Equipment List – Not all carers are happy with the list which has been posted on the Hub and Fostering Friends. Some said it seems unfair that carers who have babies will receive everything when starting out yet those who look after older children will receive nothing. Carers of babies said they are paid less and often have quite big gaps in placements, where they will not be earning. Many carers said they buy their own equipment anyway.

Meeting ended at 12.45

Minutes written by S Donoghue 9th Feb 2018
Checked by Anne Ritchie 10th Feb 2018