# Notes – in house fostering Feb 2020

**Meeting details:** 10.00-12.00, February 2020, Beecham Room, Local Government Association, 18 Smith Square, London SW1P3HZ

Attendees: Rebecca Eligon (SESLIP Chair), Amber James (Hampshire), Gill Burtwell (Portsmouth), Karen Devine (Brighton and Hove) Karl Davis (West Berkshire), Martin Smith (Southampton), Liz Shields (Buckinghamshire), Peter Hodges (Bracknell Forest), Seamus Jennings (Wokingham) Clark McAuley (Surrey), John Donnelly (Brighton and Hove) Adrian Sewell (East Sussex), Hilary Sparling (Medway), Gemma Pavey (Brighton and Hove)

**Apologies:** **Pinaki Ghoshal (Brighton and Hove CHAIR),** Karen Wright (Hampshire), Lynn Buckle (Hampshire), Sivay Heer (Milton Keynes), Catherine Seiderer (Brighton and Hove), Teresa Lavelle-Hill (East Sussex), Saima Arif (Slough), James Ball (West Sussex), Jackie Giles (Oxfordshire), Daniel Ruaux (Oxfordshire), Karen Wright (Hampshire), Sarah Smith (Hampshire), Steffi Roth (Reading) Stephany Carolan (Hampshire), Kirsty Benson-Allison (Slough)

# Item 1: Presentation of Marketing research report

**Kate Vogelsang from Birdsong Marketing reported back on a piece of work the group had commissioned** to test the USPs of LAs over IFAs. The conclusions in the report are drawn from 10 interviews and 17 people involved in focus groups. KV thanked the LAs who had helped her speak with foster carers. Key finding is that none of them could remember what they were told at recruitment, but they could remember how they felt. Those with IFA experience, were more positive about LAs. The other foster carers took this as truth. Foster carers were more inclined to trust messages from multiple sources, and so it will be important going forward for LAs to consider not just formal channels like adverts, and social media but other sources as well, like existing foster carers.

KV reported that on the whole simple statements were not very effective, and people preferred a conversation and stories from people they trusted. Levels of knowledge are limited among foster carers about how the IFA and LA offers differ and so councils may need to be more proactive, prospective foster carers, especially new ones might not know the questions they need to ask.

MS said the report provided useful insight about keeping them engaged once you’ve got them. Any insight about initial hooks? KV responded that people’s motivation was not financial – or certainly they were not willing to say that finance was a key motivator. They knew they wanted to foster from speaking to others. Quite a lot had wanted to do it, and then they got caught at the right time.

KV reflected that there wasn’t one consistent approach which worked for all carers, the key thing was about making a personal connection and really tailoring to the needs, questions and concerns of that individuals.

**The group reflected on how they will use the insights:** In Portsmouth we will use to help revamp our website. It may be helpful to agree some broad narrative so we aren’t in competition. Could we consider a facts ad knowledge base- shared leaflet.

# Item 2: Feedback from Brighton and Hove

In BH we are divided into 5 pods – the benefit is that we can regularly meet for group supervision, and this is really helpful in terms of covering leave. We share unannounced visits across the pod. There are 6 supervising social workers, 2 SFOs and a business support. Each SW has approximately 15 carers. The pod is on duty one week in three. Children’s placements team find IFA placements and then one week in three we find families. All pods facilitate at least one support group. We have a specific recruitment team, but the pod contributes. All the referrals come to in-house team first then are passed to children’s placement team if there is no appropriate in house provision. This approach has really paid dividends, in 2015 we placed 42% in house now at 67%. Most of our IFA placements are residential or complex teens, most 10 and under are in house. We have relationship based practice model.

There are a **wide Range of groups** supported by the supervising social worker (these include Parent and Child, Carers for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, Male Carers, Sole Carers, Teenage Carers, New Carers, Support Sessions for carers on Training Support & Development Standards, Therapeutic Support Group, Well Being Support Group, Sibling Support Group, BAME children Support Group (particularly transracial). We keep the groups under review. A big challenge for the future is on recruitment of foster carers from BAME backgrounds.

We also offer practical support through our 6 **fostering support officers** – who provide practical support and can help in a range of different circumstances – for example in parent and child placements to give the foster carer a break, or take child to school. The FSOs do time limited pieces of work to complement the work of the child and family social worker. FSOs can often step in and visit. They come from a range of backgrounds – quite a stable group – have 6 of these.

We have a **buddying scheme**, some are time limited, some are open ended. New carers matched with experienced carers.

We are really proud of our **Holiday activity programme**, our carers see this as something really useful, we cover the costs of all of this, so it doesn’t come out of carer allowances. It includes activity days for the foster carer’s birth children. Two different 7-12 days and teenagers.

We have a **therapeutic fostering consultant** – 15 hours a month – reflective attachment themed work. Delivers a huge amount of work in those 15 hours.

We have an **additional room scheme** – we don’t cover the cost of the works – but we do make an additional payment of £150 per week up to £23k.

Foster care association. We make a donation of £1k a year.

We have 7 courses that are mandatory. We now won’t increase payment after 2 years until the foster carers have done this training. These are delivered through an Online learning gateway- they can access all training not just those for foster carers.

We have a **children in care psychology service** (1 post) funded by health. This post offers individual consultation and runs a therapeutic parenting group (TPG) once a year– every 3 weeks for 6 months for 8 carers. This intensive support is based on attachment theory. Everyone has a chance to speak about the young person they are looking after. On second one now. None of those on first scheme have broken down – Offering a graduate TPG – after 6 months to check in.

We use sleepovers as terminology rather than respite carers.

We have a Foster carer surgery – open informal meetings with managers.

We also hold **Carers with vacancies meeting**- every 6 weeks whilst they are vacant to keep them engaged and supported.

# Item 2 feedback from Hampshire

**AB presented Hampshire** Modernising Placement Programme:  **which moves from a focus on** in-house focus to looking at all placement types with a focus on permanency in its broadest sense. We wanted to start with a blank piece of paper and to think about parity across different care environments and to maximise use of 8 care homes, but where we have been struggling with staffing. It is about rethinking sufficiency.

A detailed needs analysis in Sept 2019 looked at 1259 placements and looked at children’s presenting needs in different care environments and considered all the care types, looking at staying put, shared care as an approach which can be relevant outside of disability, unregulated placements post-16 support, family-based intervention. We are looking at international and domestic models

The voice of the child is paramount– young people will be researchers to gain their experiences, we are also doing work to ensure the voice of the birth family.

We have a workstream around culture and values. Why do we have that view that fostering is better, residential last resort. In some situations because of this foster carers can feel devalued, we set them up to fail, and it also has an impact on residential staff. How do we raise up the residential.

Based on our assessment of presenting needs we are now looking at whether they are in the right placements for now. This might mean an increase in movement.

There is an in-house fostering workstream which is divided according to the journey. **Marketing** Who do we market to, focus groups with the public. Some people who know nothing about it, talked to them about messaging. **Assessment:** Lean review of assessment process, are we too risk averse – do we really need people with child care experience. **Placement:** We will always need IFAs we will never be sufficient, so how do we make that work for us and increase the sophistication of our approach to commissioning **Retention:**  deregistration, placement breakdown – analysis in to why we are losing people. We are also looking at millenials and the under 35s as an under-used group. There are some barriers, but can we overcome them.

I agree with the finding from the marketing research. Carers don’t remember what you say, but how you make them feel.

# Item 3 feedback from the North East and North West regional fostering group

**North East In** the North East there are a number of different regional fostering sub-groups: fostering leads, commissioning, recruitment. The fostering recruitment leads is very mixed group and mixed skillset and there is lots of sharing between the group, not just on the detail of campaigns and approaches that have worked, but people with skills in digital or social media sharing those skills/providing advice to other LAs. They’ve been using Mosaic to help do better targeted marketing by segmenting audiences.

The NE has developed a regional interagency protocol which they are happy to share

We have piloted a social work led recruitment approach based on the insight that in the North East there is social work led adoption recruitment which was leading to higher conversion rates, so set up the same for fostering. 2 social workers. It is now part time social worker and part time support worker. Now it is about consistent approach to enquiry and enquiry keeping which means for some people we are seeing they are converting after a few years of their very first enquiry. We are doing some regional work looking at different LA’s criteria. We are happy to share the form even though the criteria are different.

**North West** In the North West the regional arrangements are just forming, they have not yet got an established regional group. RE attended their first meeting to share practice from the SE and how our group operates. It feels like the NW are keen to get together and share practice, but not necessarily to identify any projects or areas of joint working. RE will keep in touch with them and keep us updated.

# Item 4 mystery shopping

The next three authorities to do the mystery shopping are: Surrey, Portsmouth and then Southampton. The methodology is agreed and each LA will need to lead about once every three years.