# Agenda – South East regional fostering network

**Chair: Sarah Daly DCS Portsmouth** Attendees: Attendees: Kerry Bailey (Portsmouth) Cathy Seiderer (Brighton and Hove), Jackie Clark (Portsmouth), Berni Farmer (Isle of Wight), Helen Field (Southampton), Gemma Pavey (Brighton and Hove), John Donnelly (Brighton and Hove), Karl Davis (west Berks), Keith Langley (west Berks), Chris Kuye (Brighter Futures/Reading), Mark Vening (Kent), George Mathew (Slough), Natalie Bugeja (AfC Windsor and Maidenhead), Peter Hodges (Bracknell Forest), Sharon Godfrey (Milton Keynes), Sarah Smith (Hampshire), Martin Tuck (Hampshire), Robert Wayman (Hampshire)

LAs not represented: Surrey, Wokingham, Medway, West Sussex, East Sussex

**Meeting details: October 19 2022** via MS Teams 10-11.30

**Items 1 and 2: Introductions and action log**

The minutes and actions from the last meeting were agreed

**Item 3: Mystery shopping**

Milton Keynes presented their mystery shopping findings. SG reflected that it was a helpful exercise for her as head of corporate parenting. What she thought was interesting was she was expecting workers on the front line to talk through the USPs of LAs over IFAS, none of the LAs said they were good or outstanding. Quite a number of agencies scored well, with people positive, friendly and helpful and informative. The mystery shop found some lovely initiatives around additional training, diplomas and showing commitment. Information about money and expenses was a bit vague / no detail. Good examples around peer support, buddy systems, specialist events. Lots of suggestions which Milton Keynes will be using to review website.

CS reflected that they made a decision to opt out of mystery shopping it feels frustrating, low enquiries and difficult time for the service. We now have the people doing the right things. GM agreed the mystery shop is different from usual calls.

The group agreed that Bucks would next quarter mystery shop and provide feedback on the websites.

**Action:** RE to develop a tool for Bucks to use for website mystery shopping

**Item 4: Practice Sharing Milton Keynes**

Did a review of our data, types of children coming into care, age range of carers. We found, like many LAs that we have an older cohort of carers, and during pandemic we lost quite a few, so therefore we needed to consider what do we need to do going forward. We have more younger children and 15+ coming in, we don’t have many middle age children. The Milton Keynes analysis of the last 5 years where 5 year ago there were 126 carers and now there are 82. If Milton Keynes did nothing we would have no internal fostering in a year or two.

As a response to this data, Milton Keynes relaunched the website. Your landing page is most important, they all have specific teams working on IFA websites, and as an LA we need to compete. He reviewed every LA fostering website, Welsh LAs they all have a standardised approach. Has to have USPs, subsequent information about testimonials, policies, pay and offer, and then information for carers working for you on a separate site members-only site.

Once the website was updated there was a digital campaign from Oct-Dec. SG reflected that she wasn’t sure it was cost effective. This was supported by various events happening locally, advertising in magazines, radio interview, all of these had a focus on busting the myths around fostering. We’ve got the Chief exec and elected memebrs to agree to be a foster friendly city council. This means lots of things including that any employee would have reviewed rights if they became a foster carer - 2500 people work for the council. Then going out to big companies operating out of Milton Keynes. There were also 600 households that volunteered to host Ukraine refugees, they have spare beds. We are talking about how we can approach them to understand their receptiveness to fostering.

Milton Keynes is also looking at parent and child foster placements, encouraging LGBTQI carers, and carers for CWD and disabilities.

JG said had similar experience of external agency not delivering value for money. JG said we are going back to them to extend homes for Ukraine and rematching. Similarly how do we have those conversations.

**Acton:** share how to contact Ukraine hosts to see about receptiveness to foster CS, JG and MG. Add to agenda for future meeting.

**Action:** CS: would like to get a national message out to encourage people in fostering like the adoption campaign. Can we get children’s commissioner to write a letter? SD to escalate. Letter from Scottish equivalent is here: [Foster care recruitment: letter to public - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/foster-care-recruitment-public-letter/)

**Action:** Rebecca to circulate previous research around the USPs of fostering with an LA

PH shared for awareness – Bracknell Forest is fostering friendly. SW are connected persons and get 10 days additional leave and an unintended bonus. I like the idea of Wales and some standardised bits. We are all spending so much on honing our websites and competing against each other. Can we collectively resource that together to spend less. The IFAs will have teams on this every day. The regionalisation of adoption agencies via ATV has worked really well. I wonder what lessons we can learn from this.

**Item 5: Regional UASC project Martin Tuck**

MT explained that this is a project to help LAs to meet their needs on the national transfer scheme. MT looked at whole journey from arrival through to achieving independence. Spoken with LAs, one of the biggest problem we have is out of area placements. Vast majority of UASC are going to IFAs, over 70% of foster placements are out of area in the region. Social worker time is hugely impacted by that. Social worker’s abilities to respond to crises. When they are placed out of area it is difficult to access care leaver support then either LA pays for high cost placement until leave to remain comes through from the Home office or the young person is uprooted and moves back to the LA which may cause trauma following a period of settlement.

Through the project we have seen some really good examples of support and training for foster carers. Welcome packs and sleep packs are not widely advertised but are useful - giving a message that you are wanted here. West Berks has a peer mentoring scheme which grew out of community group. They invited some of the original mentors in the scheme who are now working and living independently to share their experiences and mentor newer younger UASC. Really heart warming and encouraging to hear what they had to say. The YP are matched with other people who have gone through the journey. They helped them with public transport and getting to grips with processes and things that take up lots of SW time. YP are still in touch with and supporting each other. I lost count of the times they used the word family.

These things really helped those young people settle into their communities and achieve independence. Positively, some choose to end up in private rented house shares which is often difficult for care leavers, but they are thriving in these environments because of the support they received and that they are moving in with other young people they have a relationship with.

There are some examples of IFAs that specialise in placements for UASC, they seem to be less profit making and focus on placing in areas with high ethnic minority populations in London.

As part of the project we are also looking at regional care commissioning model, opportunity to pilot approach with groups of LAs. This pilot could be focused on training, support, peer support or placements… still under development. The more coordination we have as a region the more likely we are going to be to have placements within our regional boundaries. Developing a package of tools and supports. Help line from Refugee Council.

**Action:** CS asked for welcome booklet. MT to provide.

**Item 6: Mockingbird and Inside Out**

RE updated on the Mockingbird programme which is progressing well although some LAs have had to stand down, so there is capacity if any other LAs want to explore starting up. The first LAs in this cohort are due to go live in the autumn (Bucks is first).

Inside out is concluded and the final report is being drafted

**Action:** Schedule Learning report findings for January meeting

**Item 7: AOB**

**Action:** Anti-racist practice and journey – recruitment through to post -approval support. Postpone item to January 2023

**Covid risks:** CS asked about how we are protecting foster carers given Covid cases are rising?

JC we are starting to do carer household reviews virtually instead of in home to reduce risk. BF doing reviews and visits virtual/face to face unless there are reasons to go in. Masks available if foster carers want that.

Ofsted had expectation of us going back to face to face visiting. Need to check in, if taking a more flexible approach.

**Action:**  SD to check if Ofsted ok with return to virtual visits given increasing covid risks?

Fuel costs: MK say they are not doing anything specific but signposting the general hardship. MG reflected there is slightly increased mileage rate and workshops in Slough for advice and guidance on managing energy costs.

**Action log:** This action log was updated 9 January 2023. Shaded lines, actions are complete

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|  | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Date issued** | **Status** |
| **25** | CS, JG and MG to share share how to contact Ukraine hosts to see about receptiveness to foster. RE Add to agenda for future meeting. | MG, JG, CS | Oct 2022 | Open |
| **24** | RE to circulate previous research on USPs of LA fostering | RE | Oct 2022 | complete |
| **23** | MT to provide welcome book/pack examples for UASC to RE to circulate to the group | MT | Oct 2022 | Open |
| **22** | SD to check if Ofsted ok with return to virtual visits given increasing covid risks? | SD | Oct 2022 | Open |
| **21** | LS to circulate CCTV policy from Bucks | LS | July 2022 | Complete |
| **20** | MV to circulate Kent slides | MV | July 2022 | Complete |
| **19** | KL (West Berks- circulated) and JC (Portsmouth) offered to share their recruitment crib sheet. | KL and JC | July 2022 | Complete |
| **18** | Bucks to do mystery shop for Jan (poss testing online/email contact), review mystery shopping in Jan | LS | July 2022 | Complete |
| **17** | Can we monitor and discuss Ukraine again next meeting | DG | April 2022 | Closed |
| **16** | Chair to escalate issues re: Inside Out | DG | April 2022 | Closed |
| **15** | West Sussex to share retention officer JD  | JB | April 2022 | Open |
| **14** | Kent to share practice next time | MV | April 2022 | Closed |
| **13** | Map management structures and roles, map respite/sleepover offer through survey | RE | April 2022 | Closed |
| **12** | Draft model of excellence for next time based on learning over the last several waves | RE | April 2022 | Closed |
| **11** | Next waves of mystery shopping are Bracknell Forest (July), then Milton Keynes (October) then Bucks (Jan) | RE | April 2022 | Closed |
| **10** | RE to contact IoW Milton Keynes and Surrey who have had no reps at the last two meetings | RE | Jan 2022 | Closed |
| **9** | Terms of reference to be finalised and uploaded to SESLIP website.  | RE | Jan 2022 | Closed |
| **8** | JB and MS to share contact details for training delivered on anti-racist practice | JB and MS | Jan 2022 | Closed |
| **7** | Discuss at April meeting which of the areas for regional collaboration the group want so take forward first (discuss with new chair) | All | Jan 2022 | Closed |
| **6** | LS to share legal advice received in relation to case where unions involved, re: foster carers and employment rights. | LS | Jan 2022 | Closed |
| **5** | Rebecca to draft Terms of reference and regional priorities for consideration at next meeting | RE | Oct 2021 | Closed |
| **4** | Any LAs interested in forming project team to develop regional recruitment website contact Rebecca. Revisit this action in Jan 2023 pending outcome of Care review and capacity of Las to take forward.  | All | Oct 2021 | Open |
| **3** | Reading to share practice and mystery shopping at January meeting | SJ | Oct 2021 | Closed |
| **2** | All to contact Alistair Herbert to arrange support with using the fostering projection tool. Fostering projection tool to come back once further work complete. (Agenda for Jan 2023) | All | Oct 2021 | Closed |
| **1** | All to publicise regional online SG conference | All | Oct 2021 | Closed |