

### Corporate Parenting Board - 24 February 2009

<b>Title of paper:</b>	Evaluation of the foster carers questionnaire – August 2008	
<b>Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):</b>	Ann Goldsmith Director of Specialist Services	<b>Wards affected:</b> All
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<b>Other officers who have provided input:</b>	Lynne Anderson – Service Manager Fostering Service	
<b>Relevant Council Plan theme(s):</b>		
Choose Nottingham		X
Respect for Nottingham		X
Transforming Nottingham’s Neighbourhoods		X
Supporting Nottingham People		X
Serving Nottingham Better		X
<b>Summary of issues (including benefits to customers/service users):</b>		
<p>In August 2008, foster carers in Nottingham City Council were issued with two questionnaires. The first looked at the feasibility of increasing communication with carers via email and internet via a secure site. The second explored gaining feedback regarding Fostering Panel and the various ways we support carers, including the support received by supervising social workers and child social workers.</p>		
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>		
1	That the Board note the contents of the report and identify a date for feedback in relation to actions to be progressed as a result of the evaluation.	

# **1 BACKGROUND**

## **1.1 Evaluation of the foster carers' questionnaires – August 2008**

Of the 178 fostering households the questionnaires were sent to, 39 responses (22%) were received regarding computers and 45 (25%) were received regarding support services to foster carers

The majority of responses were positive, especially towards the support from social workers.

## **1.2 Results from the Computer Questionnaire – 39 Responses**

- Of those 39 who responded only 3 carers did not have a computer. All who did have a computer were connected to the internet via a broadband connection. 79% of carers who responded possess a computer with internet and email.

### **Carers were asked to evaluate their own competency on the computer**

- 53% of carers said they could write, format and send emails and attach files
- 10% of respondents said they could format, and send emails, but not attach files
- 12% said they had used email software but did not consider themselves competent
- 17% had never used email software
- 79% could use search engines to find other websites
- 28% could download files from websites
- 46% use websites to find information
- 15% use online discussion boards
- 10% do not use the internet

### **Foster carers' suggestions for improving the mailshot were as follows:**

- Requests for more notice of events and activities.
- There was a query as to the relevance of the mailshot for home from home carers.
- Request for stories or information on other foster carers.
- Sometimes the mailshot is too big

### **Carers were asked how they would like to receive the mailshot, the respondents stated the following.**

- 46% would like to receive the mailshot via email
- 48% would like to receive the mailshot in hardcopy form.
- 7% would like the mailshot in downloadable format

## **Carers were asked if they if they would access a secure website for information.**

- 64% said Yes
- 12% said No
- 20% said possibly, the main criterion for which was the ease of use.

### **1.3 General questionnaire – 45 Responses**

20 of the carers who responded to the questionnaire had been to Fostering Panel in the last 12 months. Most stated it had been a positive experience, even if a little nerve racking. The description of those on Panel was that that they were kind and helpful. There was one carer who found the whole process distressing, but she did not explain the reasons for this.

17% of carers had not received a foster carer file, which raised the question as to whether there was confusion in the naming of the file.

#### **Contact with social workers**

Foster carers reported frequent telephone contact with both the child social workers and the supervising social workers.

In terms of visits, supervising social worker visits ranged from weekly to 12 weekly dependent on the circumstances. The majority of carers stated that they received monthly visits.

In rating the quality of support carers received from supervising social workers, carers stated the following.

- 55% stated the level of support was outstanding
- 37% stated the level of support was good
- 6% stated the level of support was acceptable
- 0% stated the service was unacceptable.

Most of the respondents reported that they received visits in line with statutory requirements from the child's social worker. However there were several that described the visits as sporadic, rare or irregular.

In rating the quality of support from child social workers, carers stated the following.

- 20% stated the level of support was outstanding
- 26% stated the level of support was good
- 24% stated the level of support was acceptable
- 11% stated the level of support was unacceptable

Responses to phone messages and answering calls feedback was all positive.

We asked foster carers what they would like us to start doing, stop doing and continue doing; there were many suggestions, some were obviously pertaining to individual circumstances, but particular trends are:

#### **Start doing:**

- Prompt payments
- More opportunities to meet, both carers and children.
- Better communication between social workers when someone is going off on

- leave, especially in communicating issues and contact arrangements.
- More notice for events and training
  - Ensuring good levels of support out of hours
  - Offering a crèche on mandatory courses
  - Being better prepared for children leaving care
  - Treating carers as co-professionals, listening to their views at reviews etc
  - Using email
  - Giving regular updates, when awaiting placements.

### **Stop Doing:**

- So much paperwork
- Assuming it is easy to find childcare
- Assuming it is ok to use annual leave to attend training
- Social workers going on leave at the same time.
- Having so many changes in staffing.

### **Continue doing:**

- The children who foster group
- Sending out questionnaires so foster carers can express opinions
- Mailshots
- Face magazine
- Making sure children don't have too many placements.
- Offering high levels of support
- Asking for carers' views.

The main theme out of this section was the request for better communication between departments and in the fostering service.

We also asked for feedback on particular aspects of support:

### **Education Support Team**

Feedback was positive, many stating how helpful the team had been in finding placements in schools for children.

### **Targeted Support team**

Few commented on the team, unsure of who they were. Those who commented, did so positively.

### **Out of Hours**

Those who commented stated "very good".

### **Fostering Network**

All positive comments

### **Emergency Duty Team**

This received a mixed response, many stating it was frustrating getting hold of an

answering machine and having to wait a long time for a response, although others said it was a good service.

### **Support Groups**

CCSS group received several special mentions, as being a good support group “going from strength to strength”

General comments were very positive.

### **Transport**

Comments were very mixed, some drivers were excellent, others were late.

### **Stores**

This department received the most comments, with the overwhelming majority being positive. “Helpful” “excellent” or “good and efficient”. One carer commented the furniture was not up to the rigours of teenage behaviour.

Many stated they would be willing to pitch-in with organising events.

There were many positive statements about individual social workers that would be good to feedback.

Overall feedback was very positive.

#### **1.4 Recommendations for Further Action by the Fostering Service**

- Explore the possibility of a secure website for launch in 2009
- Explore a trial opt-out for those who wish to receive mailshot via email and re-evaluate after 6 months
- Aim to give a minimum of 3 months notice on all events and activities, with a second notice in the interim 3 months
- Continue supporting computer courses for carers

#### **2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)**

- 2.1 This information was requested at a previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

#### **3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 None

#### **4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY)**

- 4.1 None

#### **5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS)**

- 5.1 There are no specific risk management issues arising from the information contained in the evaluation.

**6 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION**

6.1 Nottingham City Council Foster Carers Questionnaires August 2008

**7 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT**

7.1 National Minimum Standards Fostering Services – Department of Health 2002

7.2 Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board 26 January 2009