

DEVON FOSTER CARERS' ASSOCIATION



MINUTES

Meeting on 13th March 2017 at 10.30 a.m.

At Oaklands Court, Tiverton

Present; Patricia Bagshaw, PJ Mann-Trudgett, Glyn Oliver, Lewis Crowden, Sarah Turner, Martin Yeo, Leigh Strange, Kim Brachtvogel and Phil Brachtvogel.

Apologies Received: Heather Attwood, Mandy Heggadon, Rosemary Miles, Deb Whiteway, Keith Parsons and Lin Parsons.

The secretary produced an **AGENDA** for today's meeting

1. **Agree Minutes** of last meeting of 9th January 2017.
2. **Matters arising;**
 - **Company Registration;** Secretary advised that Companies House had, initially, accepted the paperwork to register the Association but she had received an email subsequently to say that registration might not be necessary after all. An appointment has been made to discuss it and check it further and an update will be provided to the next meeting.
 - **Exeter Foster Carer's Association donation** - As MH had given her apologies today, the Secretary advised that, previously MH had advised that the Bank for Exeter Foster Carers Association (National Westminster) were prevaricating on paying the balance of £134 to be donated to this Association but that she was working on it. MH to be asked to provide update for next meeting
 - **Balance of funds** - The Treasurer confirmed that the balance outstanding of £210 from the donation from Children's Services had now been received and paid into the bank. He also advised that he had acknowledged the offer of a further donation of £500 for the year 2017/2018 from the previous Operations Manager of Children's Services in a letter and this donation is expected to be received shortly after April 2017 (i.e. the new tax year).
 - **Annual Statement of Foster Carer's Allowances** - The Chair advised that, there had been no response to her letter on behalf of the Association around the issue of securing Annual Statement of Carer's Allowances and that, **contrary to National Minimum Standard 28.2**, we appear to be no further forward in securing these. **DISCUSSION** around how to move forward with this. **AGREED**
 - The Chair and ST to raise again at next Strategy Group meeting on 20th March.



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- The Secretary to investigate how these have been secured in other areas around the South West and feedback to next meeting.
- The Secretary to also provide carers with information around securing a basic print-out of income received from Devon County Council from the Finance Team, on the Association editorial for Fostering Devon Newsletter and on the Association Facebook page, until this issue can be resolved.
- **Respite** – In the absence of a reply to the letter to Sonia Sandiford about the annual statements, it was considered not possible to arrange the meeting agreed to discuss this further (in accordance with the Minutes 9th January 2017, copy as follows (*relevant section in red for ease of reference*)); -
 - **Mocking Jay Project** – *LS advised that she had been unable to acquire full information from Fostering Network about this, as the Project is licensed through a company in America and they are very protective of what information is given out. She had, however, sought further information from Fostering Network, and from members of the South West Fostering Forum and relayed emailed information provided by Chris Kolkhoff, FN. SWFF members had also given some very positive feedback about their experiences and knowledge of it. General **DISCUSSION** followed.*
 - *ST advised **some carers were already operating this on an informal basis (with the knowledge and support of their SSW's) and was working well.** It was felt a more formal approach such as Mocking Jay was unnecessary and could put more burden on the LA finances. LS advised the Mocking Jay was not intended to add to the burden on LA finances, but to reduce the impact of placement breakdowns. **Some carers thought there was no respite available any more, while other foster carers were already offering respite and not being used. 3 attendees at today's meeting advised they did not feel they were being used to full advantage. Carers would like to know who is in each locality so they can make direct contact, friendships and support one another. Questions raised around whether this 'informal' approach was being worked across the County and, if not, could this happen? It was felt a similar model in each locality throughout Devon could be really helpful in supporting placement stability, (avoiding placement breakdowns), as well as supporting carers individually (e.g., in attending appointments elsewhere – such as funerals, birth child's graduation, etc. (e.g. appointments where it would be inappropriate or undesirable to have the CIC present). It would also felt it could avoid the need for a CIC going into respite with people they barely knew. LS said it was clear we needed to have a better understanding of what was already available.***
 - **AGREED;**
 - **a.** Lance from Placement Team to be invited to next meeting to offer information about how the placement team operates.
 - **b.** Strategy reps present (PB, ST and DW) to enquire at next Strategy meeting on 23rd January...
 - *How many respite carers are not being used, at present and why?*
 - *Where are the respite carers? Are they in each locality? (Carers present lived in Exeter, Teignmouth and Hatherleigh)*
 - *How is the system currently managed?*
 - **c.** Some feedback from carers countywide to be sought via two questions being posed on the Association Facebook page; LS to do this and collate responses for next meeting.
 - *Are there any respite carers currently not being used?*
 - *How many carers have had difficulties accessing respite?*

AGREED the Chair and ST to request a meeting with the Operational Manager Fostering (Sonia Sandiford) to share these Minutes and seek clarity on; -

a. Whether the informal model of Mocking Jay IS being utilised across the County and, if so, how carers can access one in their area. Are all SSW's aware of the informal models in use? If no model exists in each locality, could consideration be given to replicating this in each area?



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b. When carers can expect to receive the outstanding Annual Statement of Carer's Allowances (in the absence of any reply to the Chair's letter)

It was recognised that while the nature of the 'respite arrangements' in Exeter have been of a 'friendly arrangement', (where carers who work in and around Exeter help one another with child care, etc. as a group of friends helping each other out would do), carers in other areas have not got the same resource (perhaps because of a lack of networking (particularly for carers in outlying areas) or knowledge about the possibilities of replicating this model). It was noted that carers in Exeter do not make arrangements in isolation of the Service and when mention any need for respite, to the relevant social workers, who would be involved in the final arrangements.

The Chair and ST to raise these questions at the next Strategy Group meeting on 20th March.

- **Fund-raising.** DL was not present at this meeting. DL to be asked to provide update for the next meeting
- **Tax Seminar – Feedback.** LC expressed his thanks to Mandy Heggadon, Trish Bagshaw and Leigh Strange for organising the recent **Tax Seminar** and asked that thanks on behalf of the Association should also be extended to Andy Kirk from The Fostering Network. He felt it was very helpful and informative and the feedback generally from carers has concurred with his view. The Secretary informed the meeting all feedback received, both at the seminary and since (via Facebook page and personal comment) had been positive. **AGREED** This Seminar to be organised each year, around March, for carer's benefit. Secretary will provide carers with a summary of the event, by way of attachment to these Minutes and the Fostering Devon newsletter. LS to extend thanks in a letter to Andy Kirk.
- **Sons and Daughters event –** General discussion around whether any interest has been demonstrated in this event. ST advised that, while sharing it at her local support group, the general view seemed to be that it is more expensive than those carers would wish to pay. Carers present **AGREED** to enquire at their local support groups for carers' views and feed back to the next meeting, when a decision will be made whether to organise this event or not. It was considered that it was worthwhile doing AN event, but perhaps not something quite so big. To that end, it was **AGREED** that ST to enquire of Crealy, LS to enquire at the High Ropes Centre, Abbotsham and PB to enquire at Calvert Trust about what offers each can offer the Association and to feed back to next meeting.
- **B/F. Welcome Pack (for new carers).** PB apologised that she had not yet had time to speak with Charles Sumner to ask whether existing carers could be involved in the updating / renewal of this to ensure (from a carers perspective) that it's as helpful as it can be, and includes all relevant information – e.g. about this Association, guidance around what type of things to consider at Placement Planning meetings, etc. but she would try to do so again in advance of the next meeting.
- **Flip Chart –** no ideas were put forward at this meeting

GENERAL DISCUSSION

- **Placements and Respite -** Carers expressed disappointment that placements do not appear to be being used effectively, as a number present were currently without placements (and some had been for some time). Carers would appreciate an insight into the 'policy' in relation to placements and respite.

The Chair and ST were asked to explore this issue on behalf of members in a general discussion at next Strategy Group meeting on 20th March, specifically,



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- a. How many respite carers are not being used, at present and is there any general reason for this?
- b. Are there sufficient respite carers in each locality? Is a list available for carers to contact direct?
- c. How is the system currently managed?

The Secretary has extended an invitation to Lance Feldman (Placement Team) to next meeting on 28th April to offer an insight into how placements are considered and made.

- **National Insurance Contributions for Carers** - The meeting understood that foster carers do not automatically qualify for **Class 2** National Insurance credits and foster carers should seek to acquire a letter from the Fostering Service, confirming they are foster carers for Devon, and have been for however long, to ensure they are able to qualify for these credits. HMRC will not grant these credits without such a letter and if carers do not have sufficient Class 2 NI contributions before they retire, it may impact negatively on their entitlement to state pension.
AGREED Secretary to make carers aware via the Association editorial on the next Fostering Devon Newsletter and via the Facebook page.
- **Development Plan for Fostering with Carers' Involvement** - Carers suggested Devon County Council could work to **develop a 2yr and 5 yr plan** in relation to developing and improving the fostering service, rather than appearing to react with sudden changes that, many feel, simply serve to de-stabilise the service overall. Morale among staff (which members felt was apparent from the numbers of people appearing to leave the teams across the County) and foster carers are not conducive to a stable service. It was felt, in developing such a tool, it would be useful and pro-active, to involve foster carers at 'ground level' to enable potential change to be well thought out and carefully organised before implementation.
- **National Minimum Standards** - Carers present were disappointed to note that there is currently no information on the Devon Fostering web page about level 3 payments and the payments and allowances information generally available is out of date (2014/15). This is **contrary to National Minimum Standard 28** ("Foster carers are clear about the service's payment structures and the payments due to them") and very confusing for some who have no idea what **level of payment** level 3 carers are paid. It was also noted that the service should review allowances and fees annually and should **consult with carers – in advance – of any changes (National Minimum Standard 28.3)**.
- **Strategy Group** - Carers enquired of Strategy Group representatives present when carers might expect to receive regular Minutes of Strategy Group meetings?
AGREED the Chair and ST to raise at next Strategy Group meeting on 20th March.

It was also **AGREED** that future agendas will include a heading for items for consideration / discussion at Strategy Group for those representatives attending future meetings to consider / pass on. Items raised at this meeting; -

- It would be helpful for carers to have **clarity on allowances**, as agreed previously at Strategy, in accordance with NMS 28.5. At present level 3 payments are not publicised and the allowances and payments handbook (in print and online) is out of date (2014/2015)
- **Improvements to communication**. Rumours abound of new restructure - this is causing some anxiety among carers as to whether this will include further changes to carers allowances and fees without consultation with carers (contrary to NMS 28.3)



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- **Publication of statistics of placement breakdowns** and numbers of vacancies within the service would be helpful
- **Formal outline of the purpose of the Strategy Group** would be helpful – carers are feeling disempowered as issues raised through their representatives (i.e. lack of annual financial statement (NMS 28.3), lack of clarity on allowances (NMS 28.5) are being unheard or ignored and acted upon.
- Questions were asked at the meeting of 9th January around future changes; - how financial reward was proposed to be linked to placement stability, etc. Carers expressed concern about the future plans, not knowing how to contribute to these discussions because they don't know what form they are taking or which direction they are going in

AGREED Strategy Group reps present to raise these points at the next meeting on 20th March

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

GO advised the meeting that **South West Water Authority** have a scheme whereby carers may be entitled to have a 'cap' on their water bills. **The Water Sure Scheme** affords savings if a carer has a young person placed with them with a skin condition and subject to a disability. This could potentially save carers half the cost of their annual water bill. **AGREED** the Secretary to inform carers by way of these Minutes, the Fostering Devon Newsletter 'slot' and via the Facebook page.

MPJ mentioned certificates for **training** are not being spelt correctly or arriving in good time and, those that arrive by email, and having to be printed by carers, are involving further cost to foster carers. Some carers present have not received certificates for training already undertaken. Any difficulties in this area should be referred to the training team manager (fosteringservicestraining-mailbox@devon.gov.uk) and SSW's should be made aware.

The Secretary advised that some members have been enquiring about recommendations of **insurance companies and accountants**. General discussion. **AGREED** the Secretary would seek to find out company names that carers are currently using and then will create a list of both that carers can consider when looking for support and guidance in these areas. Neither the Association, nor individual carers, will accept liability for any decision to use any of the companies mentioned.

The Secretary advised that **Foster Care Fortnight will be from Monday 8th – Sunday 28th May** this year. Members to consider whether any activities or events would benefit carers and inform the next meeting.

Meeting ended 12.50p.m.

Signed by the Chair.....as a true record on.....

**NB: NEXT MEETING –
Monday 28th April @ 10.30
Venue; Oaklands Court, Tiverton**

If you'd like to join us on our Facebook page, just let us know and we'll send you a 'friend request'. Just accept it and we'll add you to the group. SIMPLE!

