

DEVON FOSTER CARERS' ASSOCIATION



MINUTES

Meeting on 28th April 2017 at 10.30 a.m.

At Oaklands Court, Tiverton

Present; Patricia Bagshaw, Leigh Strange, Lewis Crowden, Jan Millard, Nicky Knight, Rosemary Miles, Kim Brachtvogel and Phil Brachtvogel.

Apologies Received: Mandy Heggadon, Deb Whiteway, Glyn Oliver, Helen Nash, Sarah Tate, Martin Yeo, PJ Mann-Trudgett.

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

1. **Agree Minutes** of last meeting of 13th March 2017.
2. **Matters arising;**
 - **Company Registration;** Following information given at the last meeting, the Secretary had sought further advice on the necessity of registering the Association with Companies House from Fostering Network, South West Fostering Forum, Companies House and independent legal advice. Becoming a limited company would only limit the committee's personal financial liability in relation to any claims being made against the Association and, since it is not intended for the Association to hold significant amounts of money, it was considered this would not be necessary. Discussion held around potential impact of claims being made following poor advice given to members but it was agreed that the remit of this Association is not to offer advice but to signpost members and offer accounts of personal experience for information. Further discussion about the responsibilities involved in becoming a limited company involved recognition that it would be necessary to provide audited, annual accounts which could cost the Association in the realms of £1,000 – £2,000 per year. If it was agreed to become a limited company, the risk of offering poor advice could be reduced by a change in the Constitution to reflect that only one member of the committee could be authorised to offer 'advice', while limiting the level of advice given. **AGREED.** The Association would not, at this time, register as a limited company with Companies House. This may change at a future meeting if the Association circumstances change and members decide otherwise.
 - **Exeter Foster Carer's Association donation** – A message had been received from MH to say that she is still working on the Exeter Association's bank to release the money granted to this Association. It appears there is also a second account, holding a further £95, which is also expected to be received. Further information will be forthcoming from MH at the next meeting.



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- **Balance of accounts** - The Treasurer offered an end of year balance to the meeting. To 31st March 2017 there was £304 in the Association Bank account. With deductions, the account is currently in credit at £298.95. LC stated that the agreed donation from Devon Fostering Service of £500 had not yet been received and PB was asked to request this at the next Strategy Group meeting on the 22nd May. If the funds are received by the Treasurer before that date, he will notify PB accordingly. If the funds are not received within 2 weeks after the 22nd May, the Secretary to write to the Operations Manager requesting payment.
- **Annual Statement of Foster Carer's Allowances** - The Chair advised that, there continues to be no response to her requests, on behalf of the Association, for the provision of 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. The Secretary informed the meeting that, as requested at the last meeting, she had enquired of the South West Fostering Forum members if they received these and all, but one, of the regions represented received these. One SWFF member provided a copy that LS shared with the meeting and it was noted that DCC had already had sight of Wiltshire's model. It was concerning to the meeting that Devon was not complying with the National Minimum Standards in this regard, particularly in view of the recent email consultation exercise sent to carers (on the 7th April) in which its new draft Foster Carer's Charter declared that it would "ensure that our fostering service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance".

DISCUSSION around how to move forward with this. **AGREED**

- The Chair to raise again at next Strategy Group meeting on 22nd May,
 - The Secretary to support members by informing carers that they can contact the Finance team requesting a list of all monies received from the Fostering Service for the purposes of evidence to the Inland Revenue, in relation to tax liability, in the meantime.
 - The Secretary to also provide a draft letter that members may, if they wish, submit to the service, requesting an annual statement in accordance with the National Minimum Standards (28.2).
- **Placements and Respite** – LS confirmed that she had written to Lance Feldman (Team Manager, Placements Team), as requested at the last meeting. A copy of his reply was provided to the meeting, which stated that, having spoken with the Operations Manager, it was felt that it would be more effective if he attended Strategy Group to disseminate information. Consequently, he will not be attending this meeting. PB (as Strategy Group rep) informed the meeting that he had provided information at the last Strategy Group meeting in this regard, as follows; -
 - There are currently 689 children in care – a drop from recent months
 - Current demands for placements is changing generally and there are currently 113 carers, with 5 vacant placements in South and West Devon, 71 carers with 3 vacancies in the DYPAS team, 112 carers and 9 vacancies in the North and Mid areas and 124 carers and 16 vacancies in Exeter and East.
 - Some carers do not drive and with the recent embargo on the use of taxi's there has been a significant spend on taxi costs - £374,000 – and this has, on occasion, been a factor in determining placements.
 - Matches to vacancies in March stood at 7.9%
 - There are a number of reasons for vacancies – i.e. changing nature of children being placed, (i.e. being more complex), and matching to current placements, sibling groups, and out of date blocks on placements going through social workers, etc.



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- **Fund-raising** – LS informed the meeting that, regrettably David Leyland has had to resign as fund-raising member, and this position is available for anyone who feels they can take it on. There were no volunteers at this meeting, so this will be brought forward to the next meeting.
- **Sons & Daughters event** – While some information has been forthcoming from some members about alternatives, it appears there are insufficient people willing to commit to the event suggested. **Carers present at the meeting on 13th March are reminded;**
 - *Carers present (at the meeting on 13th March) **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.*

In the absence of MH, this matter will be brought forward to the next meeting.

- **Welcome Pack (for new carers)** – PB informed the meeting she has heard nothing back from her requests about this. New carers present (approved February) stated that they hadn't received any welcome pack and felt very much 'in the dark' about what was available to them. In particular, they were unclear about what delegated authority they had and what paperwork they should be printing from the Fostering website. Neither had they seen a copy of the National Minimum Standards, yet it was noted, all carers are expected to work within these. Members present offered general guidance and signposting with regard to sleepovers, etc., and where to locate the NMS. PB to raise this at the next Strategy Group meeting. LS to prepare a letter to Charles Sumner, on behalf of this Association, to request that existing carers become involved in the updating / renewal of the Welcome Pack, to ensure (from a carers' perspective) that it's as helpful as it can be, and includes all relevant information carers might need (again, from a carer's perspective) – e.g. about this Association, guidance around what type of things to consider at Placement Planning meetings, etc.
- **Development Plan** – *at the last meeting it was felt 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.*

PB confirmed she had made reference to the 5-year development plan at the last Strategy Group but it appears there is no current plan in existence.

3. **Flip Chart** – there were no suggestions to record made at this meeting

STRATEGY GROUP – Information was requested at last meeting (13th March) i.e.; -

- *Clarity on Allowances* – Allowances will remain static with existing placements
- *Improvements to Communication*
- *Publication of statistics of placement breakdowns*
- *Form outline of the purpose of Strategy Group*



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Update and feedback - PB informed the meeting that the LA restructure plan will begin in July. The score will be determined by the supervising social workers and the new paperwork should be on the website in April. There was discussion around the draft Savings and Pocket Money proposals. The issue of savings for young people was brought up by the operations manager, as she was under the impression that this had moved from consultation into policy. It was pointed out that foster carers, however, have not yet been informed of the practical arrangements and a policy has not been published yet. Sonia will follow this up. Although Placement Support is, initially, for a 6-week period, this period is a review period and support can be increased, if needed, following review. There are likely to be further changes when the restructure begins. The Fostering and Adoption Team will become Fostering and Permanence with a new Adoption Team being regionalised into South West Peninsular, as nationally. Some of the current adoption team will be joining the placement support team, so skills will not be lost. A new 1-10 'score' will be included on all supervision paperwork to identify which placements may be struggling and which are doing well. I.e. placements consistently scoring a low number will be deemed to be struggling (and, consequently require more support) than those consistently scoring higher numbers

Strategy Group Minutes – Questions arising.

1. Carers continue to feel disempowered as issues raised through their representatives regarding the lack of annual financial statements (NMS 28.3) and lack of clarity on allowances (NMS 28.5) are being unheard or ignored and not acted upon. When can carers expect to receive these, please?
2. When can carers expect to see a copy of the Minutes of the meeting dated 20th March please?
3. Questions arising specifically from the Minutes dated 23rd January;
 - 1. When will a regular copy of the Strategy Group Minutes be made available, please, and where are they to be found on the website?
 - 3. No response has been received by carers with regard to the question of additional monies (i.e. leaving care grant, PEA funds, etc.) being paid direct into carer's bank accounts and the resulting impact on tax liability. When will this be forthcoming, please?
 - 6. This Association has not yet received the promised £500 donation for the year 2017/18, despite this being recorded within the Minutes. Could this be forthcoming, please?

PB asked to raise the above with Strategy Group at their next meeting on 22nd May.

SOUTH WEST FOSTERING FORUM – Feedback. LS explained that, regrettably, Keith & Lin Parsons had informed of their intention to resign as foster carers for Devon and, consequently, would no longer be able to attend these meetings. LS attended the meeting on the 23rd March, on behalf of the Association. The Agenda covered

- Annual Financial Statements
- Asylum Seeker Children
- Fostering Network News, and
- General discussion

Notes attached for information.

OTHER BUSINESS

4. Fostering Service – Consultation. Members present confirmed they had seen the email of 7th April and attachments relating to this.



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The Secretary provided a copy of the new, proposed Charter with changes from the existing Charter highlighted orange. Of particular interest to the meeting was the statement within 'What foster carers can expect from the fostering service';

- 1. "will ensure that our fostering service will meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance" - *how does this fit with the current issue of annual financial statements?*
- 2. "provide you with full details of all relevant departmental policies and procedures" – *it appears new carers may not be receiving these at present*

The Complaints Policy and new proposed Criteria for Level 3 Carers raised questions among members who were advised to submit these before the consultation deadline on the 5th May.

Carers present discussed the importance of providing their views on all 3 parts of the consultation before the expiry date of 5th May. AGREED: LS to post a reminder on the next Association newsletter slot.

5. Discussion around the recent **BBC Spotlight programme**, where it covered Plymouth's recent decision to advertise and recruit professional foster carers that appear similar to Devon's recently discarded Family Care Worker model. Plymouth clearly felt there was a need for such foster carers in their region. It was noted that there are other LA's currently seeking similar foster carers.

6. **National Fostering Stocktake – Call for Evidence.** (<https://consult.educatio.gov.uk/children-in-care/national-fostering-stocktake-call-for-evidence-1/>). Carers present were provided with a copy of the Stocktake - Call for Evidence, published online, with a request that each looks at the Call for Evidence and submits their own views on the website provided. The end date for responses is the 16th June and responses will be taken into consideration in the panel's recommendations to Government which will impact on how the Government reacts to fostering nationally in future. This is an important time for fostering and, as opportunities for individual carers to be involved in the changing future of fostering are few and far between, this is a golden opportunity for carers to have their views heard. LS to include this on the next Association 'slot' within the Fostering Devon newsletter and paste to the Facebook page.

7. PB informed the meeting that the first meeting she attended with the Senior Management Group had made a 'promising start'. Meeting ended 12.50 p.m.

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

**NB: NEXT MEETING –
Monday 12th June @ 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!



REMEMBER, THIS IS YOUR ASSOCIATION



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Summary 1 to Minutes 28th April 2017

Lack of Annual Financial Statements – National Minimum Standards

1. Carers have long been clear about the impact on their tax liability in the absence of annual financial statements and efforts are still being made to secure these. In the meantime, at our last meeting on 28th April, it was suggested that members should be made aware that they can request **a list of all monies received** from the Fostering Service Finance Team, to be able to identify whether they have any tax liability. Carers are being provided with this information on request and, while it doesn't entirely solve the dilemma caused by not having the annual statements (which the Local Authority has a duty to provide in the National Minimum Standards – 28), for those carers who are having to use the more complicated method of calculating their tax it will, at least, help in providing a breakdown of all payments received from which you may be able to identify which payments are taxable and which are not.

Requests should be made to either Paul Fitchett paul.fitchett@devon.gov.uk or Helen Weeks helen.weeks@devon.gov.uk by simply '*asking for a list of all payments made to us, from the Fostering Service to enable us to evidence our income for the purposes of the Inland Revenue*'.

2. Carers who also need a letter confirming that you are foster carers for Devon, and for how long, for the purposes of **Class 2 & 4 National Insurance** should approach their supervising social worker, in the first instance.

3. Carers who may wish to write on their own behalf should do so to [Sonia Sandiford, The Interim Operations Manager, at Room 269, County Hall, Exeter EX2 4QD](#) to express their wish that **annual financial statements** be provided to carers in accordance with the National Minimum Standards, and a suggested draft may be found below;

Dear Ms Sandiford,

I am aware that Local Authorities are required (under National Standards 28.2) to provide foster carers with an annual financial statement and note that I have not received this. Could you arrange for me to receive this as soon as possible, please?

If this is likely to take some time, could you, in the meantime, arrange for the Finance Team to provide me with a print-out of all payments made to me from Devon County Council, as soon as possible, please, and advise when I may expect to receive the annual financial statement in the future?

It's difficult to evidence to the Inland Revenue which payments have related to the needs of the child we care for (which are un-taxable) and which payments relate to the our 'income', or 'other expenses'. The Children's Service may not be aware but 'other expenses' include PEA monies, third party purchases (such as reimbursement of school uniform, etc.) and reimbursement of mileage. Given that we, in Devon, are now required to cover much more mileage than in previous years (as a consequence of the decision to cease in the use of taxi services), we are mindful that we may be required to pay significant amounts of tax and we are now having to be specific and precise about the level of payments we receive from Devon each year to ensure we are not paying tax where it is not necessary. All payments received from Devon, except payments directly related to the child's allowance, are counted in relation to our personal taxable allowance, so I'm sure you can see how important it is for us to be clear about what work we undertake, and are paid for, on behalf Devon.

As we are now in a new tax year, I'd be very grateful to receive this information as quickly as possible, please.

Yours sincerely,

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Summary 2 to Minutes 28th April 2017

South West Fostering Forum meeting - 23rd March 2017

NOTES

(Please note these are NOT formal Minutes, but merely recollections of discussions by Devon foster carers who were present)

Areas represented; **Devon, North Somerset, Swindon, Cornwall, Fostering Network.**

Prior to the meeting, the Secretary to **Devon** Foster Carer's Association (LS) asked that the following be included on the agenda for discussion;

- Annual Financial Statements – do all LA's in the SWFF provide these to carers?
- Do other members of SWFF have experience of their LA failing to meet NMS and, if so, how have these concerns been raised?

1. Annual Financial Statements

General discussion around which LA's provide their carers with financial statements. All areas represented – **except Devon** – provide their foster carers with annual financial statements. The Chair (**Cornwall**) [provided a copy of hers for information](#). CK (**Fostering Network**) asserted that it was an OBLIGATION on the part of LA's to provide these to foster carers. LS enquired what mechanisms and enforcements were available where LA's refused to comply with the expectation (Nat Min Standards), despite requests over many years. CK suggested that, as Ofsted were the publishers of the Standards, they could be approached for further advice on how to encourage LA's to provide statements.

CK advised that the Fostering Network have a training course around implementing National Minimum Standards that LA's can buy in for staff and carers benefit. There are 6 FN reps nationwide. Fostering Services nationwide are required by central government to complete a snapshot annual financial return by 31st March to enable the Department for Education and OFSTED to compare authorities – the final figures must be submitted by the end of June. The 'snapshot' can be downloaded online – <http://www.devon.gov.uk/statement-of-accounts-13-14.pdf>.

CK informed the meeting that there is also a regional meeting of Directors of Children's Services where they can compare good practice between each LA.

2. Asylum Seeker Children

SH (**North Somerset**) raised awareness of the Applied Suicide Intervention Services Training and UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children) Training, stating it was available to all Local Authorities and free to foster carers – can be accessed via Dep't for Education. Recommends carers check out the Home Office regulations and guidance for fostering young UASC.



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3. Fostering Network News

CK provided leaflets relating to the State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016 inquiry ([attached](#)). Discussion and explanation. Full results of the inquiry are not expected before summer recess.

WL provided a copy of a draft letter found via the Fostering Network's website ([attached](#)) – headlined 'Exciting news from the Foster Care Workers Union – and can you write to your MP?' CK was quick to point out that this letter was NOT sanctioned by Fostering Network and was prepared by the Foster Carers Union, which is a branch of the Independent Workers of Great Britain Union (IWGB).

CK also advised that the Dep't for Education have published details of new foster carer allowances – which can be found via Fostering Network website - <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/news/2016/response-recommended-national-minimum-allowances-being-frozen-in-england>

TRAINING REQUEST

The FN is looking at creating training specific to 'Men in Foster Care' and asked the meeting to enquire of its memberships whether any men who currently foster would be interested in taking part in delivering training to others around the country.

"IF ANY OF OUR MALE FOSTER CARERS WOULD BE INTERESTED IN TAKING PART, PLEASE CONTACT CHRIS KHOLKHOFF AT THE FOSTERING NETWORK"

4. General discussion

JB (*North Swindon*) pointed out that when completing self-assessment tax forms, carers nationwide should be careful to tick Class 4 National Insurance contributions and not just Class 2 as there are changes to the current structure affecting future pension rights of carers.

NB; DATES FOR NEXT MEETINGS; -

22nd June,

21st Sept,

23rd November 2017.

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