

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 19th April 2017

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PART I **FOR SCRUTINY**

ADOPTION AND FOSTERING INSPECTION OUTCOMES REPORT

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To outline the outcomes of the Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) Inspection 23rd – 27th January 2017 and the Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) 5th – 9th December 2016.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel:

- a) note the progress being made to deliver the adoption and fostering services; and
- b) consider ways in which scrutiny could be applied to further support the recommendations from Ofsted in respect of each service for the delivery of improved services for our looked after children requiring short or permanent placements, including adoption.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Priority 1 – Protecting vulnerable children

3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes

Outcome 5: Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances

4 Other Implications

a) Financial

There are no financial implications specific to the recommendation in this report.

b) Risk Management

There are no risks identified in relation to the recommendation in this report.

c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act or other legal implications relating to the recommendations in this report.

d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of an EIA in relation to this report.

5 **Background Information**

5.1 The 5 day inspection of the adoption service took place 23-27 January 2017, and the 5 day inspection of the fostering service took place 5-9 December 2016. Two Ofsted inspectors were involved for each inspection. This was the first time that these services were inspected under the regulations as an IFA and a VAA as part of the Trust arrangements rather than previously as Local Authority services.

Fostering

5.2 In terms the overall effectiveness, the fostering service was judged as 'Requires Improvement'. The Inspectors found that the service had focused on outcomes for children and placement stability which was judged good, and the Trust had addressed all the areas identified as inadequate in the SIF; but the reason the Trust IFA was not judged as good was because of basic breaches of the Fostering Services Regulations.

5.4 During the inspection there was evidence of some good and outstanding features, and the inspectors found that the Trust has demonstrated what they described as 'phenomenal improvement' since last year's SIF inspection.

Details of practice

5.5 Outcomes for children were good, and this was a clear strength. We evidenced that since the IFA was established, 85% of children who moved from their SCST foster carers went onto permanency via adoption, Special Guardianship Orders or were rehabilitated back to their birth family. There was only one placement that disrupted during this time. The inspectors were particularly impressed with health and education provision, and they met representatives from both.

5.6 The inspectors were impressed with the fostering recruitment work; describing this work as good with some outstanding aspects, and recognised the significant investment into this part of the service. They found that there were high quality processes and a strong Fostering Panel that was safeguarding-focused, with a central list and detailed/timely responses given.

5.7 With regard to the safeguarding aspect - risk of CSE and children going missing – good practice was found, with processes in place to be excellent going forward, and training had been planned for foster carers in January 2017. Young people reported

feeling safe, and no child was judged at risk in their placement. Inspectors found evidence that there had been a clear promotion of the voice of the child, which was a big improvement on the previous year. Matching was done on a case by case basis, but there had not been a clear systemic approach that could be evidenced, and there had been no evidenced learning from where a match had not been successful. The friends and family elements were a clear positive in practice. Foster carers recruited by this agency provide caring and nurturing environments that are conducive to meeting the emotional and health care needs of the children living with them.

Adoption

- 5.8 In terms the overall effectiveness the adoption service was judged as 'Requires Improvement'. Within that, outcomes for children, and leadership and management were judged as good.

Details of Practice

- 5.9 The inspectors found that since commencing operation, the agency had made good progress. A number of improvements were embedding and there were plans being implemented to further improve the quality of the services provided. The agency had forged supportive and useful relationships with other organisations and professionals that were supporting the agency's journey of improvement. They specifically praised the leadership and its positive impact. They found 'the developments show that the resources are managed effectively and that the leadership and management demonstrate a strong capacity for improvement'. In addition, inspectors recognised 'a strong commitment to adoption' and 'high aspirations for the agency' from the leadership team.
- 5.10 Outcomes for children were also rated as 'good', with children 'well prepared for adoption'. The report noted that 'The agency has a strong ethos of safeguarding and ensures that children's well-being is the paramount consideration' and 'adopter recruitment has a strong focus on child protection'.
- 5.11 The commissioning of a post-adoption support agency whilst meeting minimum standards did not, in the inspectors' view, provide the level of assurance that was needed for a judgement of 'good'. However, a dedicated post-adoption support worker was now in post who was praised in the report.

Requirements/Recommendations

- 5.12 The fostering report made six requirements which relate to the lack of monitoring in the service such as foster carer agreements, training for foster carers and records being up to date. There were a further 4 recommendations, all of which are being, or have been, implemented. There is a clear action plan in place to ensure that this work is closely monitored.
- 5.13 The adoption report made two requirements which are related to the accuracy of information in the Child's Permanence Report, which is the report written for a child being placed for adoption, and the employment of therapists undertaking post adoption work. There are a further 4 recommendations all of which are being implemented.

Key actions taken

- 5.14 There is an action plan in place for fostering, which includes the development of a comprehensive training and development programme, a new system in place to ensure that all foster carer agreements are completed and on file, and development of key documents which ensure that key information is gained more regularly. Performance management is also included in this action plan.
- 5.15 The adoption report with the requirements and recommendations was received on the day of writing this report. However they have already been considered and proactively being addressed by the service, and an action plan will be developed.

Governance

- 5.16 Reports in respect of the work and progress of the adoption and fostering services will be presented to the SCST Quality and Innovation Committee, and the Joint Parenting Panel.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 This report sets out some of the key messages from the adoption and fostering inspections. Whilst there is still work to be done in both areas, both inspections clearly found outcomes for children as good, fostering and adoption placements are of a high quality, and significant improvement was identified in both areas of work.

7 Appendices

- 'A' - Independent Fostering Agency inspection, December 2016
- 'B' - Voluntary Adoption Agency inspection, January 2017

8 Background Papers

None