

<b>Item No.</b> 8.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 12 July 2016	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Foster Carer Training	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Director of Children & Families	

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee notes the foster care training report and receive feedback from the committee.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. In November 2014 the council introduced a significantly improved payment scheme for foster carers, a key element of which was linking payment more closely to skills development alongside learning and training. The main purpose of this was to incentivise foster carers to develop their skills and capacity to care for children and young people, increasing the quality of care they receive, thus significantly contributing to improved outcomes.
3. In the same month the fostering service changed to a systemic social work practice model and began a process of improvement as part of the wider Social Work Matters transformation in Children's Social Care.
4. January 2015, at a fostering service development day, a short statement of its purpose "to provide high quality care for children in safe, secure and nurturing families, by means of recruiting and developing highly skilled foster carers supported by reflective challenging and enabling social workers – in order to give children and young people the best possible childhood to help them become valued members of society, maximising their life-long opportunities."
5. In April 2015 a new training program for Southwark foster carers was launched which supported the new payment approach more closely with clearer development pathways for foster carers. The program was developed to integrate a systemic and therapeutic approach to support and enable foster carers to look after children who require more than "ordinary" parenting. Much of the training is underpinned by the Secure Base Model as a foundation, and the more advanced Empathic Behaviour Management. The aim of the two models is to help foster carers feel confident and equip them with the right skills and techniques to help children experience safe and secure care.
6. In October 2015, Southwark corporate parenting committee and Speaker Box heard from a care leaver about their poor experiences of living with foster carers. While this was an experience of one care leaver, it is not representative of Southwark Fostering Service, nonetheless it was one care leaver too many. The corporate parenting committee and Speaker Box requested a spotlight on the quality of training given to foster carers. The corporate parenting committee maintains a key interest in Southwark fostering and how it develops and evolves to meet service demand.

7. In February and March 2016, Southwark corporate parenting committee looked closely at placement stability for children in care and an area for further exploration was the link between stability of placement and the training of foster carers. This report gives an opportunity to look at that particular issue in more depth.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **Training for prospective Foster Carers**

8. All prospective foster carers who make an application to foster are required to complete a preparation course entitled Skills to Foster as part of the assessment process. This is an accredited training program and Southwark use this nationally recognised best practice model developed by Fostering Network. The program informs part of the applicant's assessment to be a foster carer. This along with applicant's in-depth assessment report is presented to Southwark's Fostering Panel for recommendation for approval to foster. Once approved the foster carer will attend the core training set out below to equip them with more of the basic knowledge and skills to foster for Southwark.

### **Training for approved Foster Carers**

9. Southwark's Fostering Service recognises **three levels of foster carers**, each level related to: the skills and experience of the carer; their learning and development; and demonstrating how each of these impact positively on the quality of care they give to children
10. In maintaining the approval level or progressing to a higher level, foster carers need to provide evidence of continuous learning which is reviewed monthly with their supervising social workers and annually as part of the review process. Foster carers who are unable to meet the required standards as part of the statutory regulations will be performance managed where necessary.

#### **Level 1**

11. A newly approved foster carer is approved on the understanding that they have attended the Skills to Foster training, and undertake to complete the post approval core training program in their first year of fostering. This training will provide the evidence they need to complete the Training, Support and Development (TDS) Standards required by the Department of Education to be met during the first year of fostering, or 18 months for friends and family foster carers. Foster carers complete a workbook and gather evidence to show how they meet each of the standards. A portfolio of evidence is validated by the supervising social worker and their manager to confirm the foster carer has met and understands the standards.
12. Southwark's post-approval core training standards are set out below and a comprehensive training and learning program for carers gives extensive opportunities for to take such learning and use it in the day to day caring.
  1. Working with the Department
  2. Attachment, Child Development and Secure Base
  3. Active Listening Skills (Responding effectively to challenging behaviour)

4. On-line Safety
5. Safeguarding: Recognition & Referral, Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children
6. Safe Caring, Recording and Allegations
7. Promoting the Health of Looked After Children
8. Supporting the Education of Looked After Children
9. Transitions – helping children when they must move
10. The Voice of the Child

## **Level 2**

13. Once a foster carer has been approved for a minimum of 2 years, they can progress to the Level 2, provided they have completed the TSD standards and the Secure Base training. The foster carer and their supervising social worker will need to provide detailed evidence at the carer's review that the carer is using and applying the Secure Base model, before approval is given for progression. Supervising social workers will use visits to observe practice, and validate the carer's understanding of this. Level 2 carers should also undertake training in Empathic Behaviour Management.

## **Level 3**

14. Level 3 foster carers offer specialist care and can demonstrate through their training and practice that they are able to meet the needs of children with complex needs. This may include children and young people with exceptional emotional, learning or behavioural difficulties, as well as children with physical disabilities, who require significantly higher than average levels of supervision and care. At this level carers are expected to be able to parent with sensitivity and authority, and may be required to work as part of a therapeutic team around the child. They will be expected to have acquired skills and knowledge in Empathic Behaviour Management and implement this consistently to a high level make a difference to children's lives.

## **Secure Base: A Therapeutic Model of Care Giving**

15. Southwark has chosen the **Secure Base Model** as its framework for therapeutic caregiving by foster carers, which helps infants, children and young people move towards greater security and build resilience. The model focuses on the interactions that occur between caregivers and children on a day to day, minute by minute basis in the home environment. It requires carers to adapt their parenting so that they build trust, reduce anxiety and increase security, thereby helping children to form healthy new attachments. It can be used with children and young people of all ages and different cultures.
16. The Secure Base Model has been developed through a range of research and dissemination projects led by Professor Gillian Schofield and Dr Mary Beek from the Centre for Research on Children and Families at the University of East Anglia. It was launched in Southwark in September 2015 at a conference for foster carers and adopters at the Unicorn Theatre. It is widely regarded as the leading model of its kind in the UK. Since being launched, the model has been incorporated into other training, such as therapeutic play, caring for

unaccompanied minors and safeguarding children who go missing. The model underpins social work practice and is used in many different ways, for example to strengthen the matching process, enhancing placement stability, and to empower carers to respond more effectively to behaviour difficulties.

17. The ongoing implementation of the Secure Base Model is subject to regular dialogue with Professor Schofield from University of East Anglia on its effectiveness and impact. This model has been incorporated into the re-drafting of the foster carers handbook and across other training. A workshop is planned with Southwark Virtual Schools to share the model and its relevance for looked after children in education. Many children with attachment difficulties struggle with concentration, conforming to rules, organisation skills and managing relationships. The aim is to promote greater collaboration between professional partners in enabling children to achieve their potential. If professionals in school understand this approach and can provide a *secure base* for young people, the child's anxiety is likely to lessen and their learning and behaviour improve. Appendix 1 provides an example of the Secure Base Model.

### **Empathic Behaviour Management (EBM): Strategies that work for Foster Families**

18. **Empathic Behaviour Management** is a more advanced approach to caring for children who have been traumatised by the pre-care experiences and are emotionally insecure as a consequence and show this different forms of challenging behaviour. It builds on the foundations laid by the Secure Base Model to enable carers to provide a higher quality form of parenting to give children and young people the skilled caring help they need to develop better emotional health. It is based on the work of Clinical Psychologist Dr Amber Elliot and uses her book "Why can't my child behave" as a core guide. It is deeply skills and knowledge based but starts always from the point of view of the carer and the behaviour.
19. The approach to EBM in Southwark has been led by a full time systemic therapist embedded in Southwark Fostering Service. Foster carers receive two days initial training followed by six reflective practice sessions over a period of 3 months where carers can reflect with other carers on the meaning of children's behaviour, how it affects them and what responses are most effective. This is facilitated by the systemic therapist in an approach designed to consolidate skills and learning to maximise the ability of carers to use advanced skills in their day to day caring.

### **Caring for Adolescents**

20. Caring for teenagers can be a challenging task that requires experience, insight and a different skill set to parent teenagers with authority as well as warmth to maintain placement stability. More recently sections on teenage brain development have been introduced to the child development training to help carers understand the reasons behind some typical adolescent behaviour. Carers of teenagers are also adopting the Secure Base model to build resilience and hope, at a time when it is easy for professionals and carers to "give up" on young people. It is widely accepted that foster carers require specialist parenting skills to care for older children who would reflect a Level 3 carer in Southwark.
21. Some of the core training offer is specifically aimed at carers of teenagers. This includes particularly training in sexual health and relationships, as well as Child Sexual Exploitation. Empathic Behaviour Management covers specific

behavioural issues that can be experienced by teenage foster carers including challenging behavior, self harm, and stealing. Further exploration is required to develop specific parenting skills training, for example helping carers manage difficult situations through de-escalation techniques, non-violent resistance and mindfulness.

22. Supporting the most traumatised teenagers through well supported foster care moves beyond training to the coaching and situation specific support and learning a carer needs to care well for a child. The Fostering Service uses their systemic therapist for this purpose as well as Carelink (CAMHS for Children in Care) but it is an area that needs further development to enable the needs of the most traumatised teenagers to be met.
23. The **full range of training for Foster Carers** is set out in Appendix 2.

### **Engagement of young people in foster carer training**

24. Care experienced young people have contributed to foster carers training to help prospective foster carers gain an insight into the needs and wishes of young people. Young people will be invited to share their foster care experience and provide an opportunity for prospective carers to understand it from a young person's perspective.
25. Post approval training incorporates a module specifically on the voice of the child to ensure children and young people are at the heart of the fostering. Children placed in foster carer have an opportunity to feedback and share their placement experiences as part of the statutory LAC review process and also contribute to the foster carers annual review process, a form of feedback that while not directly commenting on training is an important guide to quality of care. Impacting on this is of course the main purpose of all learning and development.
26. Care experienced young people will be invited to help deliver a key part of the preparation for independence program that equips foster carers with greater understanding and skill in helping young people make the transition to independence.
27. Areas for development for 2016/17 will extend to care experienced young people to attend information sessions for prospective applicants interested in fostering, in addition to video clips of care leavers' experience of foster carers being embedded in the fostering web pages. The foster carers' handbook is currently being updated and soon to be opens for consultation with Speaker Box.

### **Monitoring the effectiveness of foster care training including placement stability**

28. Learning and development plans are completed with foster carers upon their approval, and once a year as part of their annual review of approval. Part of the supervising social work role is to refresh their learning and development plans pertaining to the particular placement needs. There is mandatory training outlined at each of the three levels as set out above that includes creative learning methods to maximise carers' learning and how it impacts on the quality of care they give children.
29. Since the implementation a systemic model of social work practice through the Social Work Matters transformation, as well as a therapeutic model of caregiving, carers are telling us that they are thinking differently about children's

behavior, understanding that a behaviour has a context and a meaning, which may have helped the child cope with difficult circumstances in the past. The Secure Base and EBM approach is designed to build resilience and capacity in carers to care for children and have a direct impact on placement quality and stability.

30. 44 foster carers been trained in EBM since the first course in October 2015. Social workers have given feedback on their observations on the way foster carers perceive behavioural difficulties differently following EBM and that carers 'react' less, but rather stop and think about what the child communicates through their behaviour. One social worker spoke about the foster carer who was driving with a sibling group in the back of the car who was starting to argue and fight amongst each other after a long day at school followed by contact. Instead of just telling them off, she stopped the car and got them out to have a group hug – she realised that they were feeling tired, anxious and perhaps a need to be reassured. The feedback / evaluation of impact is very positive but largely anecdotal and observational from supervision social workers, independent reviewing officers and foster carers themselves around carer's changes in thinking and behavior.

*"... an outburst may not be 'about me' – don't take it personally, but stop and think what things mean from the child's point of view"*

31. Placement planning meetings set out the expectations and outcomes of any placement from the outset and happen if possible prior to any placement but no longer than 5 days of the placement commencing. Stability and quality of the placement is reviewed as part of the child's LAC review taking account of the child's experience of the placement.

## **Mental Health**

32. Many of our children and young people are at a higher risk of developing mental health difficulties due to their traumatic early life experience and genetic disposition. Educating foster carers about the sign and symptoms of mental illness is critical in their day to day care of caring for young people. Adopting the therapeutic and systemic approach to fostering is a central part of supporting foster carers to offer specialist placements for children with higher support needs around their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Southwark Carelink (CAMHS) Service for children in care works with the Fostering Service to assess, intervene and provide therapeutic support for looked after children and their carers.
33. The foster carers' development program incorporates mental health in various guises from self harming behaviours to hoarding food, managing challenging behaviour etc. The foster carers handbook is currently being updated which will be a useful resource for foster carers in this and other areas. Specific training has been delivered on supporting mental health in the past year and will continue to be offered. This was the most popular training during 2015/16 with 23 foster carers attending.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

34. The current training program has been running for approximately a year. Indications are that it is a positive and constructive approach to improving the quality of care that children receive and experience. The feedback from the Fostering Service in the preparation of this report would suggest the quality of

training and systemic approach to foster caring has significantly improved over the last 18 months. Both staff and foster carers have verbally shared that they are better informed to understand the needs of looked after children in providing them a secure and safe base to grow and develop.

35. Southwark's fostering payment model consists of three levels of foster care which is related to the skills and experience of the carer. This payment model has been implemented since November 2014 with the new training offer in place from April 2015 incorporating a more robust post approval training programme for newly approved foster carers. Learning and development plans for carers enable the service to transition to skilled specialist foster carers to meet Southwark's placement needs. This is achieved by offering a comprehensive training programme that includes financial incentives for foster carers to upskill and progress to level 3 carers.
36. Feedback from staff and foster carers for the purpose of this report has welcomed this payment model as an attractive development both to incentivise their learning and improve their financial situation. It has helped to focus carers on the importance of training linked to the quality of care for children and young people.

### **Community impact statement**

37. Foster care training is an important aspect of Southwark fostering provision both as a recruitment incentive to attract prospective foster carers but also to equip our carers with the right skills and experience to foster children in the borough. Where appropriate children who require fostering are best placed to remain in their borough or within a 20 miles radius of their home where they have an identity and sense of belonging, of which contributes to placement stability. It is hoped that a good training and support offer for foster carers makes an important impact on the community enabling more children and young people to be cared for within or near those communities.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
None		

### **APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Case Scenario by a Supervising Social Worker
Appendix 2	Foster Carer Training Program 2016/17

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families	
<b>Report Author</b>	Vanessa White, Head of Service, Permanence	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	30 June 2016	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments Included</b>
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	No	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	30 June 2016	

## APPENDIX 1

### **Case Scenario from a Supervising Social Worker who supported Foster Carer in implementing secure base strategies into day to day fostering.**

Child A is an 8-year-old girl who became looked after due to neglect. Child A had one previous placement before a planned move to a newly approved fostering couple who have no children of their own. She has been with the couple since May 2014 and are currently in the process of preparing Matching panel for Child A to become a long-term placement.

The Secure Base Model has been used from the beginning even before Child A was placed with the couple. This helped to prepare the couple gain a better understanding of the model. We were able to look at Child A's history and what it might be like for her coming into the family. We discussed the fears and anxieties, uncertainties that she might experience.

As the couple had not parented together, exploring their life experiences and how they experienced a secure base was key. Using the star approach, we were able to look at all the dimensions and how they might apply them to Child A. By using scenarios we were able to come up with different strategies.

When Child A was placed the couple felt more prepared and were able to build on all the foundations laid. A particular area we worked on was how Child A really wanted to feel part of the family, with particular emphasis on acceptance from the male carer. We discussed how Child A needed to feel valued and for him to accept her and what behaviours were being presented.

We were able to look at his feelings and how fostering was an enormous learning curve that was forever changing. We looked at his strengths and skills and nurtured his confidence. The male foster carer was then empowered to take on roles that the female foster carers usually did, to help Child A feel accepted by him. We changed the routine so that the male foster carer now takes Child A to school and has more roles including taking her to CareLink sometimes. He is more equipped to help with her self esteem and show her that she is valued within the family.

The supervising social worker has been able to see the confidence grow in the family and how Child A now addresses herself as part of the family. She is always keen to share her family experiences and achievements. The Secure Base is such a fluid model that can be applied to all areas of the caregiving cycle whether the issues arise with the children or the caregivers.

The Foster Carers attended The Secure Base conference and fed back that they felt proud that they have been using the model.

## APPENDIX 2

# Foster Carers' Training Programme

SEPTEMBER 2016- SEPTEMBER 2017 (provisional)

Date	Learning Event	Level	Facilitator	Time and Venue
September	Post-Approval Induction Training – Session 1 <a href="#">Working with the Department</a>			
	Safeguarding and Safe Care (London)			
	Safeguarding and Safe Care (Kent)			
	Empathic Behaviour Management (Two day course followed by 6 reflective learning sets of two hours)			
	<a href="#">Controlling Behaviour – reflective workshop</a>			
	Blood born infections – HIV, Hepatitis			
October	Post Approval Training – Session 2 <a href="#">Attachment and Child Development using the Secure Base model</a>			
	<a href="#">Supporting children with Mental Health problems and self-harming behaviours</a>			
	Parent and Child Placements – four day training			
	Therapeutic Play for Foster Carers			
11.10.16	Mental Health First Aid: Youth - Two days			
	Caring for Unaccompanied Minors			
November	Post-Approval Induction Training – Session 3 <a href="#">Safeguarding and Safe Care</a>			
	Safeguarding and Safe Care (evening workshop)			
	Preparing Young People for Independence			
	E-Safety : protecting children from online exploitation			
	Delegated Authority			

Date	Learning Event	Level	Facilitator	Time and Venue
December	Post-Approval Training – Session 4 <a href="#">Fostering in the Digital Age – online safety</a>			
	Caring for Unaccompanied Minors			
	Managing contact with birth families			
	Saying Put and Supporting care leavers			
	Therapeutic Play for Foster Carers			
	<a href="#">Hoarding and gorging food - reflective workshop</a>			
	Preparing young people for independence - in conjunction with Speaker Box and the Care Leavers' Team			
January 2017	Post-Approval Induction Training – Session 5 <a href="#">Active Listening Skills – responding to challenging behaviour</a>			
	Advanced Safeguarding (Level Two and Three carers)			
	<a href="#">Violence and Aggression – reflective workshop</a>			
	First Aid			
	Life Story Work for Foster Carers			
	Empathic Behaviour Management (Two day course followed by 6 reflective learning sets of two hours)			
12.1.17	Mental Health First Aid: Youth - Two days			
February 2017	Post-Approval Induction Training – Session 6 <a href="#">Promoting the health of Looked After young people</a>			
	Child Development and Attachment using the Secure Base Model			
	<a href="#">Lying and Stealing – reflective workshop</a>			
	Therapeutic Play			
March 2017	Post-Approval Induction Training – Session 7 <a href="#">Helping your child with Education and PEP's</a>			
	Safeguarding and Safe Caring (for male carers)			
	<a href="#">Sexualised Behaviour – reflective workshop</a>			
	Therapeutic Play			
	Child Sexual Exploitation			
April 2017	Post-Approval Induction Training - Session 8 <a href="#">Helping children with Transitions</a>			

For more information about individual courses, and to apply, please log on to  
[MyLearningSource@southwark.co.uk](mailto:MyLearningSource@southwark.co.uk) Research in Practice : <https://www.rip.org.uk>