

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee/Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	4 October 2011
Title:	Fostering E-Comms
Reference:	3317
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The Fostering Service presented a business case to develop secure methods of communication with the foster carer community and the professionals working with them. The proposed solution was an online system which was approved by the IT Project Board.
- 1.2. The project is now well under way and implementation is in the first stages with foster carers and family placement staff.
- 1.3. The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the system, outline the project management and future developments and the benefits this system brings.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Fostering Service presented a business case to develop secure methods of communication with the foster carer community and the professionals working with them in July 2010.
- 2.2. The Fostering Service has a requirement to improve the secure methods of communication with the foster carer community and the professionals working with them. Communications and information sharing with foster carers largely involves paper copies of documents, newsletters, forms, postal mailing, couriers and envelope stuffing. The majority of the information is of a sensitive nature; dealing with individuals and personal information or business sensitive information, such as procedures and training.
- 2.3. The proposed solution was an online system which was approved by the IT Project Board in November 2010. The anticipated delivery date for the completion of the project was April 2011.

2.4. The first stages of the system are now functional and work is well under way to complete the project by the end of 2011.

3. Key issues

3.1. The objectives of the online system for the Fostering Service were:

- Improve collaborative working with foster carers with instant communications and shared information and documentation.
- Create communities who are engaged in events, training, consultations and a support network.
- Ensure the security of highly sensitive data and documentation.
- Provide an easy to use and engaging system for users with mixed IT competencies.
- Enable consultation with a wide stakeholder group in the development of policy, procedure and practice.
- Improve the reputation of services and retention of foster carers.
- Enable the efficient use of resources (e.g. advertise under-subscribed training courses for foster carers, free up social workers from administrative tasks).
- Reduce staff time spent administering communications and providing paper copies of documentation to foster carers and professionals.
- Reduce costs (e.g. printing, paper, travel, courier costs and staff hours).

3.2. The system is on target to deliver these benefits - and more. These include:

- Migration of foster carers recording and reporting about young people in their care into a secure online system.
- Policies and procedures are now at carers' finger tips with instant update ability.
- Foster carers travel claims are managed online, reducing time and costs in processing and speeding up each stage of the process.
- There is a feature on the front page for instant announcements to all carers logging on, enabling vital information to be shared with carers quickly and for limited costs - for example, alerting carers to the impending Ofsted inspection.

3.3. It was considered that some of the requirements of the fostering system were generic enough to work alongside the requirements of other Children's Services teams' requirements. As a result, the Fostering Service's specification was modified to sit alongside this wider plan, which formed the basis for the procurement of the technical platform, 'Sharepoint'.

4. Finance Implications

- 4.1. Future maintenance and servicing of the site is included in the general overall Children's Services IT Support and Maintenance Budget. The vast majority of the overall funding has come from a combination of IT budgets and 'credit' (salaries that were transferred from Children's Services to IT at CSR and can be used for priority IT development determined by the CS IT Board). IT has pump primed this work because it helped build a Sharepoint platform which can be used for a variety of purposes not just Foster e-Comms.
- 4.2. Current and previous costs of training have been financially supported by the Fostering Service budget.
- 4.3. Future training to use the system as it develops, due to any design changes and time delays, will incur additional costs which have not been anticipated. Whilst we can seek to manage this through the Fostering Service budget, there is no identified budget for this to come from.

5. Personnel Implications

- 5.1. The ongoing management and update of the system.
- 5.2. Resource allocation and expertise to support this project were identified prior to the restructuring which has put pressure on identified staffing.

6. Learning and Development Implications

- 6.1. IT learning and development skills for all foster carers and staff; changing in working practices.
- 6.2. The learning and development needs are currently being met with the Fostering Service due to the bespoke nature of the system.
- 6.3. Cost to support learning and development implications for future training will incur additional costs such as room hire for IT suites and refreshments.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. A demonstration of the system will be presented to Children and Families Advisory Panel.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.1. Equality has been improved by enabling carers to receive information simultaneously.

2. The system delivers:

- 2.1. Improved collaborative working with foster carers with instant communications and shared information and documentation.
- 2.2. Security of highly sensitive data and documentation.
- 2.3. Consultation with a wide stakeholder group in the development of policy, procedure and practice.
- 2.4. Improved reputation of services and retention of foster carers.
- 2.5. Efficiencies.

3. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 3.1. None

4. Climate Change:

- 4.1. No impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption.
- 4.2. There is no consideration of the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts.