

**Submission of Evidence to Scrutiny – Update on Fostering Services****Author** Head of Children and Young People Services, Newport City Council**Date** 4 December 2019

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**Purpose** To ensure Members are fully sighted on the progress and plans of the fostering service.**Summary** This report identifies the progress being made by the Fostering service in Wales and developments at both a Regional and National basis.**Proposal** To update Scrutiny Members of development on a national, regional and local basis.**Background**

Within Newport we currently have a Children Looked After population of around 392 children. Children are cared for by Local Authority foster carers, supported lodgings carers, Independent Fostering Agency carers and residential homes; 22 NCC foster carers are family members caring for their relatives. These are children subject to Care Orders due to the level of risks posed to the carers/children by the parental circumstances but where alternative family members have the capacity to provide safe, positive and nurturing care.

The priority is always to support children as close to home as possible and in settings that most fully meet their needs for the short, medium and long term. There is a long-term strategic plan to return our Out of County children to Newport from both Residential and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. If we do not work towards a long-term aim to increase foster carer numbers then costs of IFA placements will continue to increase.

**Newport Developments**

To support the long-term strategic plan a Fostering Recruitment Policy has been devised that aims to implement strategies to increase numbers of foster carers for NCC. This includes the implementation of a new website landing page, increasing advertising for foster carers both internally and externally and linking with different information days to increase the opportunities to recruit new carers. The payments to foster carers vary from one LA to another and are different again from the Independents. To assist in a robust package of support to foster carers it is important that the Local Authority also implement a competitive payment structure. This will all work to promote NCC as a supportive and responsibility authority to work for. The recruitment strategy is attached to this report in order for Members to have the opportunity to be aware of the proposed direction of travel. There are potentially financial implications within this strategy as there is currently no separate budget specifically for recruitment and this does potentially present challenges across the Council.

Work has been undertaken to increase and streamline our recruitment process to speed up the assessment process and retain more potential carers. An action plan to improve our recruitment strategy has been devised. A senior practitioner within the fostering service now leads on recruitment and this has resulted in a more focused approach to recruitment. Work is currently underway with SRS on developing the new landing page for the website to help with the image of Newport Fostering Service.

Figures for this financial year:

April - June (inclusively) 8 enquiries

July - September 20 enquiries (This includes August where we traditionally have very low enquiry rates) This clearly shows a huge increase of 150%.

October - We had 6 enquiries, 2 positive Initial home visits (IHV), 2 further IHV booked in

November - 1 week in and we have had 3 enquiries with one IHV completed.

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There is also a Newport Fostering communication plan that has been devised to plan the communication shared through social media and linked to boost the potential recruitment.

The Matching and Placement team are now incorporated into the fostering team as a fostering service. The support workers have transferred to Barnardo's where support is now provided to include Special Guardianship Carers. There is a larger pool of support within Barnardo's and access to a large pool of experience to support our foster carers.

Increased focus on training including an online training package which has seen a significant take up during the first week of being implemented. This should increase the knowledge of our carers and enable them to provide a higher quality level of care.

A number of carers have left for Independent fostering agencies and this has had both a financial impact and has lead carers to recruit other carers from Newport due to Independents policy to pay carers who recruit other current foster carers.

To assist in a robust package of support to foster carers it is important that the Local Authority also implement a competitive fee structure. The new marketing strategy will refer to the proposed increase in fees that should assist in the recruitment of foster carers. Foster carers receive financial support to care for the children; the support is linked to the ages and needs of the children. Foster carers provide care for twenty four hours, seven days a week and as such the financial support is not a salary but is a fee to provide directly for the children. NCC provides equipment for example cots, car seat and pushchairs.

The current placement costs in Newport for children in care vary from £11,400 per annum for a child under the age of 4 with no additional needs to £306,800 per annum for a child aged over 11 in residential care. The IFA fees are not banded in the same way as our in-house fees in age groups. They cover a wide range of weekly costs, ranging between £572 and £1,449 per week.

## **Regional developments**

Across Gwent as at the 31st March 2019 the total children looked after population across the region was 1622. This is an increase of 165 children (10.2%) from 31st March 2018. Whilst the total Children looked After) CLA population across the region continues to increase, there is a small decline in the growth rate (4.3%) compared to 2017-18 figures when there was a growth increase of 14.5%.

In Gwent 1137 children were looked after in foster placements across the region as at 31st March 2019, an increase of 90 children (8%) from 31st March 2018. However, the increase of children in foster placements as at 31st March 2018 was 100 children (9.6%); therefore the comparison is a small decrease of 10 children (1.6%) looked after in foster placements compared to last year.

Across the region in 2018-2019 there were **66** new approvals made with general foster carers, an increase of **24** approvals from the previous year. All LA's increased their approval rates from the previous year. The overall number of placements made available through new approvals was 105, a significant increase of 43 placements since 2017-2018, where those figures showed a decrease of 1 placement since 2016-2017. There was an increase of 40 unplanned endings during 2018/19 compared to the previous year. The highest number of unplanned endings (per percentage of CLA by placement type) occurred within the Independent sector. This is an interesting figure and indicates that in-house foster placements provide increased stability and better value for money than our independent equivalents.

There is a potential joined up regional New Year campaign regarding recruitment of foster carers. The idea is that we have one, integrated campaign to go live at midnight on New Year's Day, i.e. pre

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scheduled social media posts with a 'Happy New Year' message linked to the 20 reasons to foster in 2020. This will be backed up with social media posts, leaflets, posters and a strong PR push.

Costs options will be divided by the number of local authorities who say yes, so the more support we have the better for everyone:

- **Concept development** - £8,500 divided by authorities that are up for this so e.g. £386.36 per local authority if all 22 local authorities in Wales go for this as a media takeover or £1,700 each if divided between the 5 Gwent authorities
- **Personalisation by Local Authority** - Plus £725 per authority for personalising creative with individual call to actions and logos etc. **(so anything from £1,111 to £2,425 in total per Local Authority)**

It has been agreed that we will be part of this campaign to continue to increase our pool of potential foster carers. The 2018-2019 fostering performance report indicated that NCC needs to generate more initial enquiries. Although their conversion rate has improved, we have had fewer enquiries to process and assess. Historically we have had no active recruitment strategy in the past year and less recruitment activity hasn't been generating the same number of enquiries. Although this has meant that NCC have been better able to respond to enquiries which has assisted with increased conversion rates.

### **National Development**

There is work on a national basis with the National Fostering Framework to implement a national fostering recruitment campaign and the fostering service will continue being part of this campaign when this is developed. The campaign is working to develop a Foster Wales Brand to recruit foster carers for each region utilising a common theme and branding to recruit.

There is continued work on regional profiling, the regional core offer and the regional and national performance information.

There has been the development of a framework to assist with the learning and development of foster carers across Wales. A learning event for carers and fostering workers was undertaken to share the framework. The framework is being considered at Children's Management Meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November to agree to implement this within Newport.

### **Post Approval Learning and Development Framework is to provide:**

- Consistency and quality of post approval learning and development opportunities for foster carers across Wales
- A wide range of learning experiences offered in a variety of learning methods
- A clear pathway for foster carers to map their own professional development

Work remains on-going with the National Fostering Frameworks harmonisation of fees and allowances group.

There are no decisions arising from this report. Children's Services will be continuing to work with all partners and take shared appropriate steps to address how to increase the number and quality of foster carers within the City who work from NCC.

### **Financial Summary**

The proposals are funded from within the core Children's Services budget.

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### Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Continued rise in numbers of children looked after means increased requirement and pressure on foster placements	H	M	The proposals in the Welsh Government template lay out mitigation. First discussions have taken place to widen the scope for involvement in responsibility for reducing the numbers of looked after children	Head of Children's Services, Strategic Director of People
No increase in new foster carers recruited	H	M	New recruitment strategy and increased links with corporate comms team. Work is being undertaken to increase package of support including Barnardo's providing placement support. Proposal to increase fostering fees to compare with Caerphilly County Councils rates to help with recruitment and retention.	Head of Children's Services, Strategic Director of People
Carers leave NCC to work for other LA's or independents	H	H	Increase in foster carers fees is going to SLT. Support such as training increased. Promotion of the benefits of foster care has increased on social media. Recruitment strategy.	Head of Children's Services, Strategic Director of People
Continue with recruitment strategy and focussed member of staff to promote recruitment	L	L	Recruitment strategy written. Staff member in post who supports recruitment.	Head of Children's Services, Strategic Director of People

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**Links to Council Policies and Priorities**

The work outlined is part of the wider work of Children's Services which has been developed to support the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and is focused on

Resilient Communities  
Aspirational People

The Corporate Plan sets out the meeting of the Well Being Objectives. "Supporting children to remain safely with their families" is within Well Being Objective 3 – To enable people to be healthy, independent and resilient.

**Comments of Cabinet Member**

The report author is to confirm that the Cabinet Member has approved the report for consideration by cabinet.

**Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 contains a Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force on 06 April 2011. The Act identifies a number of 'protected characteristics', namely age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership. The new single duty aims to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the regular business of public authorities. Compliance with the duty is a legal obligation and is intended to result in better informed decision-making and policy development and services that are more effective for users. In exercising its functions, the Council must have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Act is not overly prescriptive about the approach a public authority should take to ensure due regard, although it does set out that due regard to advancing equality involves: removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these differ from the need of other people; and encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

There is no decision linked to this report hence a FEIA will be completed as and when necessary.

**Children and Families (Wales) Measure**

Although no targeted consultation takes place specifically aimed at children and young people, consultation on planning applications and appeals is open to all of our citizens regardless of their age. Depending on the scale of the proposed development, applications are publicised via letters to neighbouring occupiers, site notices, press notices and/or social media. People replying to consultations are not required to provide their age or any other personal data, and therefore this data is not held or recorded in any way, and responses are not separated out by age.

**Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

Report writes need to indicate how they have considered the five things public bodies need to think about to show they have applied the sustainable development principle put into place by the Act. You will need to demonstrate you have considered the following:

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- Long term. This report considers how to increase the number of children placed within in-house foster placements. This is positive both financially for the local authority and also is in the best interests of the children to remain in their local area and assists with plans to rehabilitate home.
- Prevention: This reports indicates the plans to try to prevent a reduction in the number of foster carers which would have a detrimental impact on the LA financially and also upon Newport's CLA who would have to be placed away from their home authority. The corporate plan states that there will be a reduction in the number of children placed OOC and this report indicates some of the ways this is being implemented.
- Integration: This links to a Wales of cohesive communities, a more equal Wales and a resilient Wales. This is working in collaboration with Welsh Government objective to return children home from OOC placements and optimise economic benefits for Newport.
- Collaboration: successful achievement of these objectives will require collaboration with education to ensure placements for our CLA in Newport and our Well-being objectives.
- Involvement: Links have been made with corporate comms team and Foster carers via Foster carer forum.

Throughout this report the core principles of the WFG are referenced and interwoven. This is clearly a long term proposal which seeks to embed preventative working as a way to ensure good outcomes for citizens. Integration with other elements of the Council and public bodies is key to the success of the proposal. Working in collaboration with families and partner agencies is vital and drives this plan. Throughout Children's Services we are looking for new ways to fully involve and engage children, young people, parents and carers this plan is key to that work.

**Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

Section 17(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 imposes a duty on the Local Authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

**Background Papers**

Appendix 1 – Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy 2019

Appendix 2 – Fostering Communication Plan

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