

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

11 SEPTEMBER 2012

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>NO</b>

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a quarterly update on developments and performance in Wirral's fostering service in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 National Minimum Fostering Standards.
- 1.2 The fostering service provides quality foster care for children who need to be looked after in public care; this is at a much lower cost than other regulated children's placements.
- 1.3 Local Authorities must ensure that they are able to provide sufficient foster care placements for those children who need family based care in accordance with the relevant Regulations and Standards governing such services.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

#### Performance Information 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 - 30th June 2012

- 2.1 The overall total number of foster carers approved by Wirral Council as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012 is 336 households and the total number of looked after children placed with Wirral foster carers is 474.
- 2.2 There are two key performance indicators that relate to the fostering service which are about placement stability.
  - PI 62 is the percentage of children looked after who have experienced three or more placements during the year
  - PI 63 is the percentage of looked after children aged under 16, who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years and who have lived in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement have lasted for at least 2 years

- 2.3 It should be noted that the performance indicators relate to all children in local authority care not just those placed with Wirral foster carers. Therefore any changes in placement stability in other placements such as residential care and foster care by independent providers will influence this performance indicator.
- 2.4 At the 30th June 2012 the provisional figure for PI 62 is 11.3% or 77 children for this period. This is above the target of 9% and is a poorer performance from last year (1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011) which was 8.9%. Further progress in this area will be made by improving placement choice by continuing efforts to recruit more foster carers, so that there is sufficient choice and capacity to make sure children's placements meet their needs, and therefore reduce the need for children to move in an unplanned way. There has also been work to secure earlier intervention to support placements of teenagers at risk of disruption.
- 2.5 The percentage of children who have remained in placement for 2 years or more (PI 63) was 66.9% (184 children) by 30th June 2012. This is an improvement from last year's (1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011) 59.8% of children and is expected to increase to the target for this year of 70%, as more foster carers are recruited from a wider pool that are more able to match the needs of children in care.

### **3.0 RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS**

- 3.1 Newspaper advertising has continued throughout Spring and Summer. The North West television recruitment campaign ran in May 2012 which Wirral supported. A strategy has been developed to launch a new campaign over the autumn which it is anticipated will enhance the present steady stream of calls from people who are interested in fostering.
- 3.2 The number of new foster carer households approved for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 - 30th June 2012 is 11 new general foster carers and 15 new fully assessed connected persons.

The breakdown for the assessment of the 11 new general foster carers is as follows  
2 Family Link  
2 Short term breaks  
3 Short term  
1 Long term  
3 Short and Long term combined

- 3.3 The number of foster carer households who received pre approval training April 2012 – June 2012 was 14 general prospective foster carer households. There are 30 prospective carer households presently being assessed. There are in addition 24 connected persons (family and friends) households being assessed, which are largely directed through care proceedings.
- 3.4 12 foster carers have ceased to foster during the period of April 2012 to June 2012, this is where the children either returned to their parents or placed elsewhere for connected carers (2 foster carers), or permanence was secured via Special Guardianship (5 foster carers) or residence orders (2 foster carers) or the foster carers resigned or otherwise became inactive (3 foster carers).

- 3.5 There has been an improvement in the take up of training by foster carers in the last twelve months which has been achieved by the emphasis put on training by the Fostering Panel, close monitoring by the Supervising Social Worker, and better communication about training events. The Operational Support Team Leader sends reminders each week about the training coming up in the “Drop In” for Foster Carers for the following Monday. The “Drop in” is held each Monday during term time. The fostering service is currently looking at ways of restoring a crèche facility recently lost for those carers with young children who want to attend this training. New Foster Carers are also supported to attend training through their peer mentor, with whom they are linked with as they are approved. Mentors will attend training with their mentee if required until they gain the confidence to attend by themselves.
- 3.6 Wherever possible family and friends are always considered as potential carers for children known to them. Viability assessments (to provide an initial assessment of their suitability) are often undertaken in respect of a number of potential connected persons, on the instruction of the Court, when a child needs to be in the care of the local authority. The number of Court directions for viability assessments is currently putting additional pressure on the fostering service to focus on the recruitment and assessment of non connected foster carers.

#### **4.0 New service developments**

- 4.1 The service has newly developed a fact file which each foster carer completes on their family to share with children before they are placed.
- 4.2 Wirral fostering service has developed a new service for ‘Parent and child placements’. There are currently eight families providing this service which includes one to one assessment and support to parents and their children. The service provides an alternative to more expensive residential facilities. It has also given more families the opportunity to stay together, whilst being assessed, rather than separated from their children.
- 4.3 In the next 18months the fostering service is looking to develop a ‘Supported’ Care Scheme which will extend foster care support to families in their own home, by supporting parents with parenting skills and routines and with the opportunity for the children to stay with foster carers for short periods for respite.
- 4.4 The fostering service is also looking at developing services to meet the needs of children that are currently placed with independent providers due to the placement requiring particular expertise such as sexual abuse, or self harm, or engaging in criminal activity, or school refusal

#### **5.0 FOSTERING PANEL**

- 5.1 The newly appointed Independent Chair of Fostering Panel has now taken up her post. The Chair has a clear job description which includes undertaking annual reviews of panel members and has responsibility for supporting the development of panel members. In addition recruitment of social workers and lay members has been taking place, to increase the central list of panel members, available to be called upon to ensure that the panel can meet as often as required to respond to the

demands of the service. Fostering Panel are scheduled to meet every 3 weeks, but can hold an extra ordinary panel if needed between dates.

## **6.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 6.1 There is a risk that the Fostering Service will not have sufficient foster carers for the number of children needing a placement and that can also meet the particular needs of individual children in the local authority's care.
- 6.2 The service recognises that there are improvements needed in both the numbers of foster carers recruited and the recruitment of foster carers from diverse backgrounds. This is being addressed as an important element of the Sufficiency Plan and the recruitment campaign. The performance of the fostering service is managed by the Fostering Team Manager who monitors the progress from initial enquiry to approval of foster carers, the reviews of foster carers (including CRBs and medicals) and the case loads of the supervising social workers.
- 6.3 At any time the local authority can be notified by Ofsted of an inspection of the fostering service. If there is an inadequate outcome from a fostering inspection this could lead to further intervention by Ofsted, including an unannounced inspection of child protection. The performance of the fostering service is continually monitored by senior managers to ensure that there is a programme for continual improvement against the national minimum standards for fostering services.

## **7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 There are no proposals for consideration in this report, therefore there are no other options to consider.

## **8.0 CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The fostering service consults with children in foster care about the care they are receiving from their carers and the service, at least annually as part of the Foster Carers review, and when they move back home or to another placement.
- 8.2 The Fostering Service consults with parents of the children in foster care at least annually for the Foster Carers review.
- 8.3 The Fostering Service consult with foster carers at least annually for their review, but also about specific changes and developments of the service and training they need to be provided, via the Partnership Group, support groups and the drop in.
- 8.4 The Fostering Service consults with Social Workers and Independent reviewing officers about the care the service provides for individual children.

## **9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 9.1 No implications in relation to this report.

## **10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

- 10.1 The budget for Fostering Services in 2011/12 was £7,661,800 and the spend for that period was £9,108,300. This includes the Fostering Team budget of £1,345,100 (including staffing of 21.3 FTEs) and a total allowances budget of £6,316,700. The overspend of £1,446,500 relates to the number of allowances paid during the year. At the end of 2011/12, 486 foster carers received fostering allowances, 24 children were in agency fostering and 162 children received Special Guardianship or Residence Order allowances.
- 10.2 In 2012/13 the budget was increased to reflect the payment of the National Minimum Fostering Allowance and the payment of fees to connected carers. The overall budget is £7,984,600 and the projected spend (as of 31<sup>st</sup> July 12) is £9,426,800 (based on 486 children receiving foster care allowances and 163 children receiving special guardianship and residence order allowances). The budget is sufficient for 500 children. The number of children in foster care, receiving special guardianship or residence allowances exceeds this by 150. There is a CYPD plan to reduce the overall costs and the number of children in foster care, however this continues to prove challenging.
- 10.3 The foster care service is being maintained at a full staffing compliment of social workers and support workers, and has recently recruited to the 1.5 vacant posts, with the new staff starting 29<sup>th</sup> August 12 and the second person expected by the end of September 12. One agency worker began working 21 hours per week at the beginning of August 12, and another full time Agency worker is expected to be recruited for 6 months in the near future. This is to ensure the service can manage the rising number of connected carer's assessments.

## **12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 None relevant to this report.

## **13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 As this report has no recommendation for policy change there is no requirement for an EIA.

## **14.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no implications in relation to this report.

## **15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 The Fostering Service ensures that children that are unable to live with their birth families are able to be looked after in a safe and supportive home environment which provides stability to children and young people and reduces the risk of anti-social behaviour.

## 16.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) Elected members consider the information in the report and satisfy themselves that the service is being managed effectively and that there are good outcomes for the children and young people that are fostered.
- 2) The financial implications arising from the payments to connected carers are reported to Cabinet.
- 3) The overview and scrutiny committee continue to receive an annual report about the fostering service, but the 3 month report will in the future be presented to the Corporate Parenting Group.

## 17.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 17.1 The Fostering National Minimum Standard 25.7 requires the executive side of the local authority to:
- receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the service every 3 months,
  - monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children

**REPORT AUTHOR:** **Simon Garner**  
Strategic Service Manager  
telephone: 0151 666 5575  
email: [simongarner@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:simongarner@wirral.gov.uk)

## APPENDICES

### REFERENCE MATERIAL

Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance  
The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011  
Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards  
Care Planning, Placement and Case review (England) Regulations 2010

### SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny	6 <sup>th</sup> June 2012
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny	16 <sup>th</sup> November 2011
Cabinet	21 <sup>st</sup> June 2012
Cabinet	18 <sup>th</sup> March 2010
Cabinet	15 <sup>th</sup> April 2010