

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 NOVEMBER 2011

SUBJECT:	FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT ON INSPECTION (INCLUDING 3 MONTH REPORT)
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	COUNCILLOR ANN MCLACHLAN
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report provides Elected Members with information about the outcome of the announced inspection of the Wirral Fostering Service by Ofsted and an update on the work of the Fostering Service since the last report in January 2010. This is the first report and inspection since the publication of new Fostering National Minimum Standards, updated Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities which came into force on 1st April 2011. In addition the Fostering Service is governed by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, the Care Planning, Placement and Case review (England) Regulations 2010, the Care Standards Act (2000) and The Children Act 1989.
- 1.2 The overall quality rating by Ofsted for the fostering service was 'good' for the quality of care with some 'outstanding' outcomes for children and young people who are fostered.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 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

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

3.1 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

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

Ofsted Inspection

4.1 This report includes the outcome of the Inspection by Ofsted of the Fostering Service in August 2011. (Ofsted Inspection report in Appendix 1)

4.2 The inspection framework enables a judgement to be made about the quality and standard of the Fostering Service and to identify any areas for improvement. The framework focuses on outcomes according to the national minimum standards. All the standards were assessed under the five outcome areas of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, achieving economic wellbeing and organisation.

4.3 Individual judgements were made as follows:

Overall quality:	Good
Helping children to be healthy	Good
Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe	Good
Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do	Outstanding
Helping children make a positive contribution	Outstanding
Achieving economic wellbeing	Good
Organisation	Good

4.4 This is a considerable improvement since the last Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service in July 2008 when the provision of achieving economic wellbeing was considered to be only satisfactory and all other areas as 'good'.

The inspectors also acknowledged the action that had been taken since the last inspection to ensure that foster carers understand the information that they are expected to keep and passed to the Fostering Service.

4.5 The inspection identified that children and young people are well supported and guided by a range of healthcare services including the looked after children's nurses, and the child and adolescent mental health service. In addition children and young people benefit from a healthy lifestyle promoted by foster carers.

- 4.6. Children and young people confirmed during the inspection that they feel safe and well cared for. They felt that bullying is addressed promptly, foster carers promote safe practices and they understand how to report significant events to protect children. Young people who go missing from home are given a high priority and steps are taken to ensure their safe return.
- 4.7 The inspection highlighted the way foster carers have high expectations of children and young people they care for and promote positive behaviours. Equally they reported on the excellent opportunities young people have to develop their educational potential and improve their life chances. Young people being supported to develop independence skills and remain in their foster carer placement beyond 18 years old are reported as positive achievements.
- 4.8 The work of the Children in Care Council was seen as outstanding and it was recognised that they are making a real impact on organisational decisions. This is ensuring that needs of children and young people are heard and acted on and resulting in policy and procedural change.
- 4.9 The inspectors considered the leadership and management of the fostering service is good and that they “*deliver child-focussed services that are not compromised by resource demands*”. They were positive about the skills and experience of the fostering team and their commitment to ensuring good outcomes for children and young people and supporting foster carers.

Areas for improvement

- 4.10 The inspection did identify some areas where improvements could be made and made the following recommendations to improve the quality and standards of care further:
- Ensure the policy for the protection of children provides, in particular for consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse and neglect (Regulation (12)(3)(e))
 - Ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation (NMS 14.7)
 - Ensure there is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers (NMS 21.3)
 - Ensure there is written guidance for foster carers and staff, which makes it clear how they will be supported during an investigation into an allegation including payment of allowance and any fee to foster carers while investigations are ongoing (NMS 22.11)
 - Ensure each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance (NMS 23.11)
- 4.11 An action plan (see Appendix B) has been developed by the Fostering Service to address the areas for improvement which will be monitored through a

Fostering Task Force which has membership of senior managers, staff from the Fostering Service, foster carers, training and development, and other professionals supporting children in care (i.e. looked after children nurses, child and adolescent mental health services).

Performance Information 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011

- 4.12 Wirral continued to perform well against the national indicator for the number children in care experiencing a placement move. NI 62 records the percentage of Looked After Children that have 3 or more placement moves which for the last year was 8.9% or 61 children. This was an improvement on our target which was 9%.
- 4.13 The other national indicator NI 63 records the length of time a child remains in the same placement. For this, the percentage of children, under 16, who have been looked after for two and a half years and who had remained in the same placement for 2 years or more was 59.8% (159 children out of 266 children). The target for last year was 72%.

Performance Information 1st April 2011 to Sept 2011

- 4.14 Up to September 2011 the indications are that the NI 62 will be on target for 9% (62 children) of children in care having 3 or more placement moves. At the end of September this is 9.4%.
- 4.15 There is a small increase in the percentage of children that remained in placement for 2 years or more (NI 63) 62.3% (162 children out of 260 children) – this figure is for end of August. It is expected that this percentage will continue to increase towards the target for this year of 70%, as more foster carers are recruited to provide a better match for children and therefore more stable placements, and also that more children who have been looked after for a long period of time either reach 16 years or leave care by achieving permanence with their foster carers through Special Guardianship Orders, adoption, or are safely rehabilitated home.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

- 4.16 A new 'Why Me, Why You' campaign was launched by the Council's Corporate marketing team in March 2011 to generate additional interest in fostering with the aim of recruiting a new group of foster carers. This involved the design of new promotional material, on the web page, on bus stops, in one stop shops, on radio during foster care fortnight and advertising in the job section of the local paper. In order to meet the anticipated additional initial enquiries and to provide an efficient prompt service all telephone calls were directed to the council's call centre instead of directly to the fostering service.
- 4.17 The number of foster carer households approved for the period April to Sept 2011 (6 months) is as follows:
- 1 family link
 - 2 parent and child
 - 2 long term

10 short term Band 1
1 short term Band 3,
5 short term breaks
17 connected person (family and friends)

Total 21 general foster carers and 17 connected persons.

In addition 3 connected persons are in the process of having a full foster carer assessment following Regulation 24 temporary approval and a further 13 connected persons who had temporary approval according to Regulation 24 who did not proceed to full assessment due to a variety of reasons such as temporary approval for holidays, the child returned to parent or usual carer, or a more suitable placement was secured for the child.

4.18 This compares with the total foster carer households approved for the 12 months April 10 to March 11 of 46 general carers and 36 connected persons.

4.19 The number of foster carer households who will have received pre approval training April to November 2011 is 42 general foster carer households and 25 connected persons (family and friends) households.

4.20 The number of foster carers that have withdrawn in the period of April to Sept 11 is 45 withdrawn, 13 of which are the Regulation 24 temporary approved carers that did not proceed and 8 are foster carers that have provided permanent homes to the children in their care through Special Guardianship and one through adoption.

4.21 The overall total number of foster carers approved by Wirral Council as of October 2011 is 309 households (196 general foster carers and 113 connected persons)

4.22 There are continued pressures for the fostering service to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of children in care. The impact of the marketing campaign and the new process of initial contact through the call centre are currently being reviewed.

4.23 Wherever possible family and friends are always considered as potential carers and viability assessments are often undertaken, on the instruction of the Court, of a number of connected persons when a child needs to be in the care of the local authority. This is putting additional pressure on the fostering service.

Support for foster carers

4.24 A new Foster Carer Partnership Group was set up in 2010 which includes foster carers, senior managers and staff from the Fostering Team. The Partnership Group meets every 2 months and considers any concerns from foster carers and has helped to develop new policies and procedures and improve practice,

- 4.25 Foster carers are encouraged to develop their skills through attending workshops and training provided by the fostering service and to complete the CWDC designed workbook CWDC. For the last 2 years a significant number of foster carers have completed NVQ level 3 in Health and Social Care (Children and Young People). Foster carers attend joint training with staff and briefings. Drop in weekly.
- 4.26 For the last two years the local authority has recognised the contribution of foster carers by holding an annual award ceremony with presentations by the Mayor of Wirral.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 It is important that Wirral Council has a Fostering Service that is able to recruit, prepare, assess and approve foster carers that meet the needs of children that are in the care of the local authority. The inspection demonstrates that the service meets the requirements of the regulations and national minimum standards and in particular provides for outstanding outcomes for children in the local authority care. The areas for improvement have been detailed above and the progress on the identified actions will be monitored through a Fostering Task Force.
- 5.2 In addition the service recognises that there are further 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 Looked After Children Change Programme which seeks to reduce, where safe, the number of children in care.
- 5.3 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. The Fostering team manager also monitors the fortnightly payments of fostering allowances and the overall budget for the service.
- 5.4 The level of demand for foster care placements continues to be a challenge adding to the financial pressures on the Children and Young People's Budget (see 9.1). Added to this is a new requirement to pay connected carers (family and friends carers) the skills Band fee in addition to the fostering allowance (see 9.3). The promotion of Special Guardianship and residence orders to secure permanency for children being cared for by connected carers will reduce the numbers of family and friends as approved foster carers. Another high cost area that is being addressed is independent foster carers. The promotion of the local authority Fostering Service is reducing the reliance on independent sector foster care placements, which have recently reduced from 32 to 27.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 During the inspection, questionnaires were sent to children and young people and foster carers for direct return to Ofsted. The inspector held focus groups with fostering service staff, social workers in district teams, fostered children, foster carers, cultural inclusion, CAMHS, Pathway team, education and health professionals and attended a meeting of the Children in Care Council. All of this consultation informed the final outcome of the inspection.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 8.1 No implications in relation to this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 9.1 The Fostering Team has a total budget of £7,671,800 for 2011-12. There is a projected overspend of £1.3m (as of 30th Sept 11).
- 9.2 The Fostering Allowances are paid to foster carers in accordance with the National Minimum Fostering Allowance.
- 9.3 According to the new statutory guidance for family and friends care, the allowance paid to connected carers must be calculated in the same way as mainstream foster carers, with any variation must relate to the child's needs, the skills of the carer or some other relevant factor that is used as a criterion for all of the service's foster carers. It states that "*where a fee is paid, it must be payable to those foster carers who meet the criteria set out for the scheme, including foster carers who are family and friends*". Currently connected carers receive the fostering allowance without any skills based fee unless they in addition foster children that are not known to them.
- 9.4 The additional cost for all connected carers to be paid an additional skills fee for each child in their care is estimated to be in the region £450,000.

It is intended that the budget implications to address a required amendment in the foster carers payments policy will be reported to Cabinet as part of the budget process.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The inspection judged that the promotion of equality and diversity is good. The inspector commented that the individual needs of children and young people are met, and their wishes and feelings are listened to.
- 11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment for Wirral's Permanency Policy was completed in February 2008. As this report has no recommendation for policy change there is no requirement for a new EIA. They recognised that equality and diversity awareness is promoted and foster carers demonstrated that equality

and diversity issues are understood and respected. One foster carer is quoted as saying:

"We are all individual and our roots are very important, we all deserve to be treated equally and our background etcetera should always be taken into account".

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no implications in relation to this report.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 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.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Fostering Service Ofsted Inspection report 12/8/2011
Appendix B: Fostering Service Action Plan from Ofsted report.

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's Overview and Scrutiny Committee	21 st January 2010
Cabinet	18 th March 2010
Cabinet	15 th April 2010