

WIRRAL COUNCIL

FAMILIES AND WELBEING COMMITTEE

5TH DECEMBER 2013

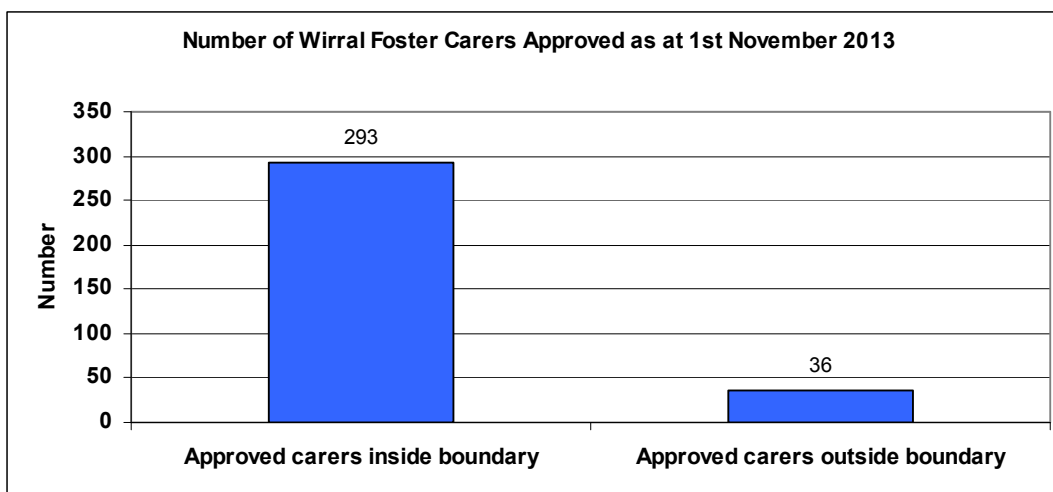
SUBJECT:	ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

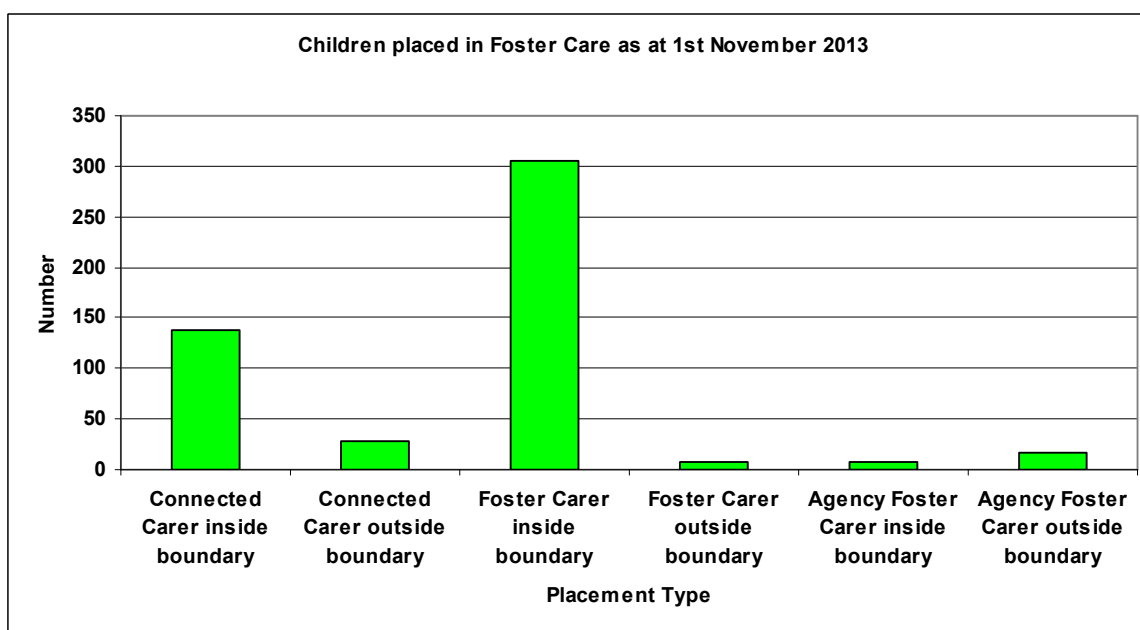
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on developments and performance in Wirral Fostering Service in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 (National Minimum Standards 25.7, Regulation 35). This is an annual report to this Committee. There are a further three reports during the year which are presented to the Corporate Parenting Group and together this supports meeting the requirements of this standard.
- 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. Fostering involves caring for a child in your own home when they are unable to live with their birth family.
- 1.3 There are many different types of foster care. Some children need a foster home for just a few days, until they return to their birth family or move on elsewhere, while a small number of children will need a family to care for them for many years.
- 1.4 When a child is placed with foster carers, they will form part of the team around the child, working with social workers and other professionals to make sure the child receives the care they need. They may also have contact with the birth parents and families of the fostered child to support their ongoing relationship and help them return home where possible.
- 1.5 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 PERFORMANCE

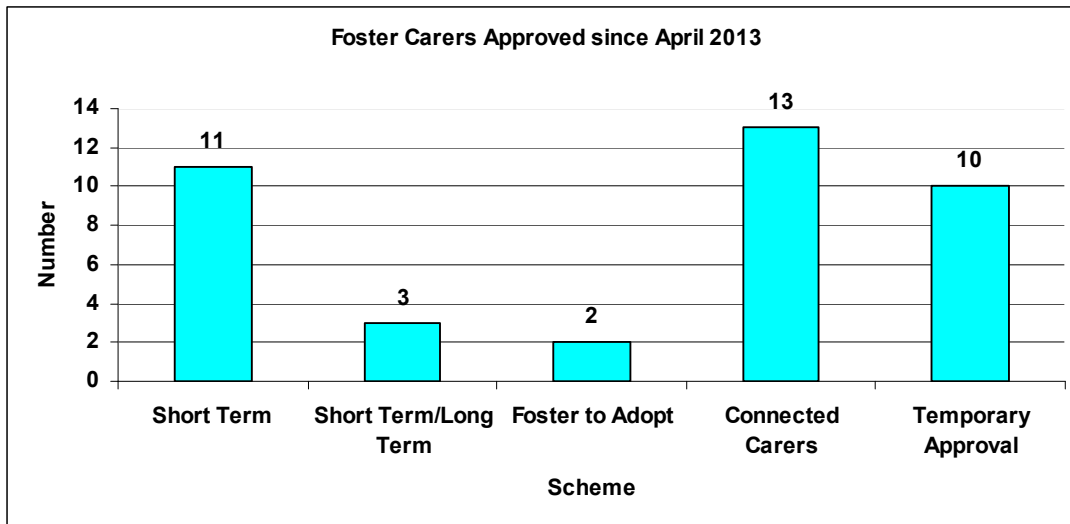
- 2.1 The recruitment of foster carers is an ongoing process locally, with a challenge to provide placement choice to ensure appropriate matching between a child and their foster carer. The recruitment strategy has focused this year on areas where there is less placement choice for children. These areas include teenagers who require foster care; children who have more complex needs; and children who are part of a large sibling group for whom there is a plan to place together.



The above table shows a proportion of foster carers who are placed outside Wirral's boundary. These are largely connected carers, related or connected to a child or children in care. The table below shows a breakdown of the type of foster care Wirral children are placed with, and this includes those foster carers who are commissioned through a private fostering agency.

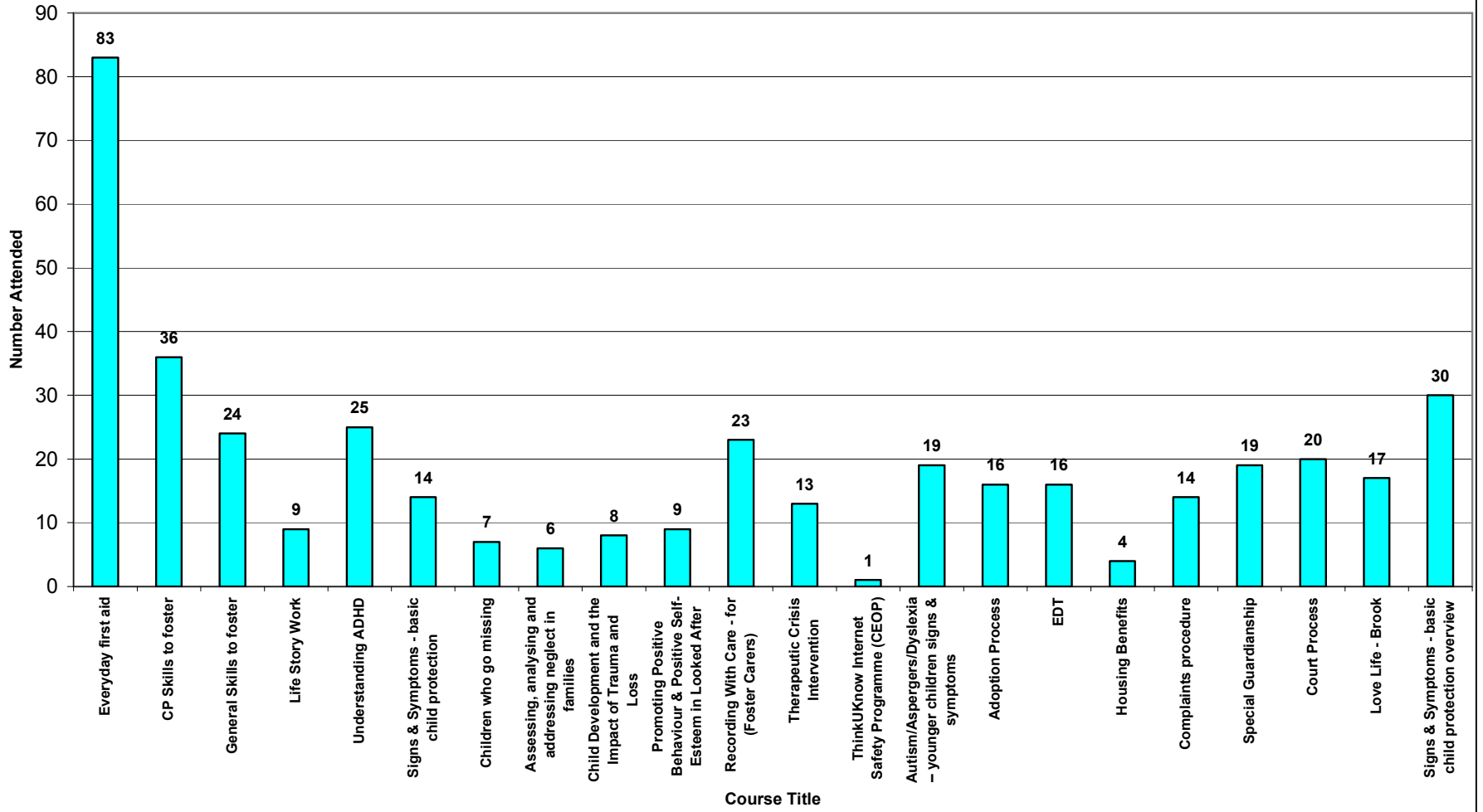


The table below simply represents a further breakdown of the types of carers that have been approved since April this year to 1st November 2013



- 2.2 The Fostering Panel generally meet every three weeks to make recommendations on approval of new fostering families, the first review of approved foster carers and any other review that is considered as necessary to return to panel, e.g. deregistration, significant changes in the foster family. It is a requirement that Fostering Services have a designated panel to meet the relevant regulations.
- 2.3 Fostering Panel is a demanding role for its members, who include independent members, an elected member, a social worker and a health professional. Panel have met 18 times within a twelve month period, considering 105 approvals, 13 deregistrations and 56 reviews.
- 2.4 The panel has a role in recommending a change of registration. The panel also have an overview of the training foster carers complete and their readiness to progress to work with children who have more complex needs.
- 2.5 Wirral Foster carers are encouraged to continue their development through training in a variety of forums, such as on line training modules, web based electronic learning, support groups and peer mentoring.
- 2.6 A new Foster Carer Web Forum is currently being developed, to enable foster carers and staff to exchange views, information, advice, support and training. This is an exciting opportunity to enhance communication between carers themselves and also for the team to keep carers up to date with information and news of events. Although the Web Forum is still in the consultation stage, it is envisaged that it will be up and running early in the New Year.
- 2.7 The table below shows the number of foster carers who have attended a range of courses. There has been a greater focus over the last year in working with foster carers on their development and promoting training opportunities. Improved attendance at training has continued. This could be further enhanced by considering how foster carers who work can be supported to attend training.

Foster Carer Training



There are two key indicators that relate to the Fostering Service which are about placement stability Performance Indicator (PI) 62 is the percentage of children looked after who have experienced three or more placement moves during the year. Percentage indicator (PI)63 is the percentage of looked after children aged under 16 who have been continuously looked after for at least 2.5 years and who have lived with 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.

It should be noted that the performance indicators relate to all children in care, not just those placed with Wirral foster carers.

At September 2013 the figure for PI 62 is 6.6%. This has reduced from the figure reported last June 2012 of 11.3%. Whilst a low percentage of children experiencing three or more placements in the year is regarded as good performance, this may also be indicative of children's plans not progressing to permanence in a reasonable time. This is being addressed through a project funded through adoption grant.

At September 2013 the figure for PI 63 is 69.8%. This is an improvement on the last figure reported in June 2012 of 66.9%.

Complaints are dealt with in accordance with corporate requirements and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. Children are supported in making complaints by an independent advocacy service, designated children's complaints officer, freephone number and information provided on the Children In Care website. There were only 3 complaints formally recorded concerning the fostering service between 1st April 2012 and 31st March 2013. This is a low number of complaints and further work is being undertaken to promote how children in care can tell us about what they are not happy with.

DEVELOPMENTS

- 2.8 Wirral Council is part of a North West Consortia of six Local Authorities and two independent agencies who bid for a government grant for the "Expanding Foster Carer project" The bid was successful and although it is early days, work has started. The project aims to develop a good practise strategy for recruitment and retention of foster carers. The project is expected to run for two years and is supported by the Department for Education.
- 2.9 The first phase of the project is data collection which is almost completed. Presently there are forums being held for foster carers, looked after children, care leavers, social workers and supervising social workers to present their views about what makes 'good' foster families, what attracts families to fostering, what keeps foster families wanting to foster and what might the barriers to fostering be? The outcome of these focus groups, along with the data collected, will inform the needs analysis which in turn will lead to the overall strategy. Wirral Social Workers and supervising social workers attended the forum with Warrington and Core Assets' on 30th September 13.
- 2.10 The Team Manager of the fostering team is part of the steering group which meet monthly with the partner agencies involved with the project. She also attends 'Learning Days' on a three monthly basis with other projects around the country.

- 2.11 Early headlines from the North West project are that Local Authorities can recruit more cost effectively than independent agencies. Local Authorities can recruit 2 foster families, to 1 foster family in the Independent agency, for the same cost. Over half of our foster carers are aged over 50 years and postcode evidence indicates we need to recruit foster carers from a wider range of wards in Wirral.
- 2.12 The project will move on to support to foster carers and to promote the development of existing carers, not simply to retain their service but to build on their knowledge and skills as an investment for the Local Authority who have already recruited them. This is an important area for Wirral to focus on, due to the resources used in recruiting and assessing foster carers, whilst also supporting existing carers. Wirral Council has a large population of looked after children. In reviewing Fostering Services' workloads across the Northwest Region, it is clear that Wirral Fostering Service has a high proportion of Looked After Children placed with foster carers, relative to the size of the workforce.
- 2.13 The Looked After Children Scrutiny Report has key recommendations which are relevant to this service. An action plan is being drawn up to be clear how the recommendations will be delivered and how they will improve outcomes for children in care and leaving care.

SUMMARY

There continue to be challenges to recruit and retain sufficient foster carers of the range and number that are required to meet the needs of the children looked after and what trends would suggest the needs to be going forward. Despite the challenges faced by the service the numbers of carers recruited are still achieving the targets set, however the issue is recruiting foster carers for the children who at present are more difficult to place and this is where the North West project provides a future strategy to support a way forward.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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 DBS and medicals) and the case loads of the supervising social workers.
- 3.3 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. The Fostering Service will be inspected by Ofsted as part of the new inspection framework.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 There are no proposals for consideration in this report; therefore there are no other options to consider.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 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.

5.2 The Fostering Service consults with parents of the children in foster care at least annually for the Foster Carers review.

5.3 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.

5.4 The Fostering Service consults with Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers about the care the service provides for individual children.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 No implications in relation to this report.

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

7.1 The budget for the Fostering Service in 2013/14 is £9,170,300. This includes budget for fostering placements commissioned from agency fostering services and payments made to special guardians, carers receiving assistance with residence orders, and lodgings. The projected spend is £9,144,518.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None relevant to this report.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 (a) Yes and impact review can be found via the following link:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010-0>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no implications in relation to this report.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 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.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 12.1 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.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 13.1 The Fostering National Minimum Standards require the executive side of the Local Authority to:

Receive written reports on the management and outcomes of the service and 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.

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
North West Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Consortia (2013)
Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny	6th June 2012
Cabinet	21st June 2012
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny	16th November 2011