

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE - CORPORATE PARENTING

18 APRIL 2018

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

UPDATE ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK (NFF) AND CURRENT WORK IN RELATION TO IN HOUSE FOSTER CARE PROVISION.

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with background information about and update regarding the progress of work undertaken on establishing a National Fostering Framework in Wales.
- 1.2 Provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with updated information about Bridgend Foster Care service provision and the fostering service review that is underway.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 The report links to all of the corporate priorities:
 - Helping people to be more self-reliant;
 - Smarter use of resources;
 - Supporting a successful economy.

3. Background

National Fostering Framework

- 3.1 For many years, key stakeholders have advocated for greater collaboration across all sectors, to address strategically the growing concerns about the overall effectiveness and sustainability of fostering services in Wales. The creation of a National Framework was seen as a means of ensuring that known concerns are addressed and of introducing greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the current system.

Phase One

- 3.2 In 2015 the Minister for Health and Social Services endorsed the framework proposal and provided funding from investment by Welsh Government to prevent children from entering care and improve outcomes for those leaving care. The agreement for the establishment of a National Fostering Framework reflected both the scale of people's concerns and also the need to support effective change, tackling some major challenges which could only be addressed at a strategic level. Above all was the acknowledgement that a National Fostering Framework will aim to achieve:

- improvement in permanence planning for children and quality of placement provision;
- a more cogent, compelling and strategic intent in relation to fostering services;
- increased collaboration and co-operation by all key stakeholders:
- sector-led improvements:
- greater transparency about performance of fostering services and efficient use of resources;
- economies of scale, where appropriate, but with a respect for localism;
- more shared services in planning and commissioning;
- consistent use of 'Best Practice' models for recruiting and supporting foster carers; and
- closer links to research and evaluation.

3.3 A 'First Thoughts' paper on the National Fostering Framework identified some suggestions for how this work might move forward. A programme of engagement and consultation was undertaken to find out what key stakeholders thought about proposals in the First Thoughts Paper. It was acknowledged that this was the start and further work would be required.

Alongside the consultation programme, a Resources and Performance sub-group was also established to focus on the development of a national performance framework, giving consideration to what information is needed to be able to manage fostering services more effectively.

As a result of the programme of engagement and consultation a Phase one report was produced and submitted to Welsh government. This report made a number of recommendations for how the National Fostering Framework work should be taken forward. These were as follows:

1. Develop a National Fostering Framework, including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures (Year one).
2. Introduce a national performance and resource framework aligning this with the work to deliver (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework to be developed for the independent sector (commercial and Third Sector providers) (Year one).
3. Introduce a national website, social media, brand identity for foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication. (Year one)
4. Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for Children who are looked after, building on the initial scoping paper in Phase One. (Year One)
5. Develop national arrangements for the commissioning of all placements regardless of sector, but building on the work of the 4Cs (Childrens Commissioning Consortium Cymru).(Year one)
6. Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services to improve outcomes for children and increase resilience for foster care placements.(Year one)
7. Establish the right balance between Local Authority foster care, third sector providers and commercial providers in terms of national policy objectives, service quality considerations and value for money requirements. (Year two)

8. Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers. (Year two)
9. Establish an all-Wales public service fostering collaborative, delivering services regionally and locally, incorporating all the relevant services directly provided by Local Authorities. (Year three)
10. Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to Local Authority foster carers (Year three)

Phase two

3.4 A national strategic steering group was established which continues to meet on a bi monthly basis attended by Councillor Huw David, Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council. A further series of consultations took place across Wales with a wide range of stakeholders about what a 'National Fostering Framework' and its components should look like. The planned implementation plan was for 2017–2020. A grant monitoring group was also established to oversee the Welsh Government funding that had been agreed to achieve the aims of the project.

3.5 The work programme from phase 2 carried out during 2016-17 included:

Work stream 1: Develop a National Fostering Framework including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting into place the appropriate structures.

- Set up small groups of key stakeholders: ADSS Cymru, WLGA, NAS, 4 Cs (Childrens Commissioning Consortium Cymru) and Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru.

Work stream 2: Introduce a national performance framework aligning this with the work being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS).

- Nine Local Authorities (Bridgend County Borough Council included) volunteered to work on the draft national performance framework; they worked together on the codes/definitions for each of the performance measures and completed a dry run.

Work stream 3: Introduce a national website, social media, brand and identity for Local Authority foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.

- Staff from 6 Local Authorities across Wales who are involved in the marketing and recruitment of foster carers have worked together. A visit to the North West of England Regional Collaborative has been undertaken to learn from their experience

Work stream 4: Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster care for children who are looked after.

- The Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru has led on this work. Regional events have been held in addition to a national conference in February 2017.

Workstream 5:- Develop national arrangements for commissioning of all placements regardless of the sector and building on the work of the 4 Cs

- The 4 Cs have taken a lead role on this recommendation. A national conference was held in October 2016, which was attended by the Group Manager Regulated Services and the commissioning and placements officer from Bridgend County

Borough Council. A working group of managers and commissioning officers are taking this forward

Workstream 6:- Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements.

- Voices from Care and Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru have led on this recommendation. Regional events have been held in addition to a national conference took place in March 2017 which was attended by the Group Manager Regulated Services and the Team Manager of Bridgend Foster Care.

Work stream 7:- Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.

- The Fostering Network has led on this work. A survey of all Local Authorities fees and allowances has been undertaken to map the picture across Wales.

4. Current situation.

Phase Three

4.1 Phase 3 commenced in 2017 and included the National Adoption Service (NAS) central team being expanded and developed in order to provide unity and coordination, supporting the coordination and leadership of the National Fostering Framework. There is no statutory basis for the National Fostering framework; however, it is recognised as a national commitment with a strong intent for improvement.

4.2 There are now regional development managers being appointed throughout Wales to engage with the national work streams and coordinate plans for delivery in their areas. Swansea is hosting this post for Western Bay.

4.3 The work programme upon which the regional plans are being developed is outlined below:

4.4 **Work stream 1: Create capacity for an extended National Adoption Services central team to provide the co-ordination and leadership for the NFF.**

- Discussions to secure dedicated funding for the NFF post 2018-19 –complete
- Consider the possibility of developing a vision for a unified adoption and fostering framework once funding is secured and ring fenced post April 2018
- A Grant monitoring group has been set up

Work stream 2:- Development of Regional work programmes based on the regional priorities identified by the national performance framework.

- Discussions with the Heads of service with a view to setting up regional work programmes - complete
- The information and intelligence emerging from the national performance work will inform the development of the work programmes

Work stream 3:- Implement the national performance framework across all Local Authorities to help shape the regional priorities.

- All Local Authorities completed the national performance framework for 2016-17.

- Capacity is to be created to analyse data emerging from the Local Authority returns. A part time performance management post will be appointed.
- Work to continue to link the NFF performance framework with the Welsh Community Care Information System(WCCIS).
- Work has begun to establish a similar performance framework within the independent and third sectors.

Work stream 4:- create an All Wales brand for Local Authority fostering. Establish a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand

- Work has been undertaken on what activity could best be delivered at central, regional and local level and this is being incorporated into the regional plans.
- A part time national marketing officer has been appointed to lead on this.

Work stream 5:- Increase capacity within the regions to respond to additional enquiries following the market activity:

- Work is underway with regions to identify current recruitment processes.
- Map the nature of additional capacity required in each region to respond to an increase in enquiries and allocate funding as required.

Work stream 6:- develop a national approach to commissioning of fostering services:

- Capacity in the 4Cs has been established to lead on this work and they are producing a Step by Step Guide to Commissioning for Local Authorities

Work stream 7:- develop consistent standards and Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care and Implementation Plan:

- Work is being led by Association of Fostering and Adoption Cymru who, in conjunction with the regions, will develop implementation plans for the draft Best Practice guide.
- Plans in place to begin dialogue with the judiciary to ensure a consistent approach within the courts.

Work stream 8:- continue work on harmonising fees and Allowances for foster carers:

- Work is being led by the Fostering Network
- Mapping out of fees and allowances across the regions has been completed
- A working group has been established with representation from each region to develop a plan as to how greater harmonisation can be achieved.

Work stream 9:- Develop a national training framework for foster carers:

- Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru, Fostering Network and Social Care Wales have an outline plan to, in conjunction with the regions, develop a draft national training framework.
- Consultation events will take place in North and South Wales.

- 4.5 Officers of Bridgend County Borough Council are represented on the work streams to ensure any developments happening locally in this area of service are consistent with those that are planned nationally.

Bridgend Foster Care

- 4.6 Bridgend Foster Care currently offers fostering services for:

- General foster care - short term, long term, support care and respite.
- The Family Link Scheme - disabled children's respite.
- Supported Lodging – non regulated service offering homes for young people leaving care who are assessed as needing further support to transition to adulthood.
- Parent and Child scheme
- Private Fostering
- Relative foster carers
- Regulation 26 carers (emergency placement with family or friends)

4.7 As at February 28th 2018 within Bridgend Foster Care:

- There were 111 approved Fostering households for general foster placements;
- There were 159 children placed with in-house general foster carers;
- There were 56 approved fostering households for relative foster placements;
- There were 75 children placed with independent fostering agencies.

4.8 A review of Bridgend Foster Care is underway to ensure maximisation of the service potential and development of the approach/model in a way that is consistent with the Residential Placements & Services remodelling project and the National Fostering Framework.

4.9 The review has a number of work streams as outlined below:-

- **Workstream One: Capacity, Competency and systems review:**

- Work has been undertaken to establish the profile of current Bridgend foster carers, where within Bridgend they reside, their level of experience and aspirations in their career development.
- Plans are in place to deliver a 16 week induction training plan for newly approved foster carers. This will improve and enhance their existing skills and knowledge to promote stability and sustainability for children in their care.
- Development of systems that monitor and process placement demands and 'children leaving care' are being progressed.
- Establishment of a system on WCCIS for placements to ensure that all placement searching and matching activity carried out is accurately recorded for children and young people using information from the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4 Cs) (as defined above at paragraph 3.3, sub paragraph 5) and to better inform the commissioning plan.
- Review the current Independent Placement Matching form and provide training and support to safeguarding teams.
- Develop a placement monitoring process for reviewing independent fostering providers with placements under 16 weeks.

- **Workstream Two:- Recruitment and retention:**

- Work with the marketing department to develop and promote specialist recruitment campaigns for transition carers, promotion of fostering fortnight and supported lodgings.
- The current carer recruitment and development programme is under review to improve career development opportunities for in-house foster carers and

ensure the Local Authority is competitive with independent fostering providers.

- Improving and enhancing support and supervision to in-house foster care households through engagement and consultation forums.

- **Workstream Three - Developing specialist foster carers:**

- Developing a support package and an enhanced training programme which will enhance the skills and knowledge of practitioners within the placements hub.
- The recruitment of a psychologist to support and advise professionals working with complex children and families.

- **Workstream 4 – Finance**

- A review of the financial packages for carers is being undertaken, this will include benchmarking in line with independent fostering agencies and other Local Authorities using the National Fostering Framework data.

4.10 The findings from this review will be collated into a report which will present recommendations and options with regard to any changes to systems, finance, policies and structure in the service.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 This report is concerned with performance information rather than policy or decision making therefore an equality impact assessment is not applicable.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

8. Recommendation.

8.1 That the Cabinet Committee notes the updated information contained within the report and supports the further development of the Bridgend Foster Care service as set out above.

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10. Background documents
None