

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

29 APRIL 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

REMODELLING FOSTERING SERVICES PROJECT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 Following the Corporate Parenting Committee on 10 January, 2019 (see Minutes attached as an Appendix to the report), this report will inform the Committee of the work that has been undertaken as part of the Remodelling Fostering Services project, and the resulting changes to Fostering Services.

2.0 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-

- Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
- Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.

3.0 Background

3.1 As part of the Remodelling Children's Social Care Programme, Children's Services have undertaken a wide-reaching review of residential services, and the fostering service was identified as an area where further service development and potential efficiencies could be made.

3.2 It is anticipated that reviewing fostering services will not only benefit the population of Looked after Children through increased placement choice, improved placement matching and more local placements, but it will also achieve cost avoidance and cost savings, which will help the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate meet the requirements of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

3.3 Reporting to the 'Remodelling Children's Social Care Programme', a project team was convened during 2016/17, whose role was to oversee the development of a range of options which would deliver against these service improvements and help achieve the MTFS savings requirements. The proposals made and initiatives implemented are shown below.

4.0 Current Situation/Proposal

Staff and service structures

- 4.1 Currently the fostering team is led by a team manager and three senior social workers. One of the senior social workers works within the residential hub and is assigned to the placements team. This role is primarily responsible for assessing and supervising specialist carers such as parent and child and transition carers (which fall under the remit of the residential remodelling). The other two senior social workers, within the fostering team, share supervisory responsibility for the fostering social workers, and placement support workers. There are eight full time social workers, five part time social workers and two full time placement support workers. Fostering social workers hold a caseload of both general carers and relative carers, (although each social workers caseloads are weighted towards one or the other) and are responsible for assessments of carers and support and supervision of placements.
- 4.2 The Fostering Team is now separated into two distinct areas; one with responsibility for relative carers and one with responsibility for general foster carers. This will enable the specialisms to further develop and also recognises the distinct differences between relative and general fostering support and training needs.
- 4.3 When recruiting new social workers in the future, job descriptions will be kept generic i.e. to cover relative and general carers, in order to ensure resilience across each service area, as necessary.

Liaison Carers

- 4.4 We currently have five Liaison Carers, who are active foster carers with a significant amount of fostering experience and have the capacity to offer one to one mentoring to a small group of carers. They attend the Skills to Foster training' programme which is available for applicants considering a career in fostering and they also arrange a monthly informal support group meeting for approved foster carers.
- 4.5 As part of the work of this project, meetings have been held with the current Liaison Carers to scope their current role and to work with them to understand how they could be more effective in the future and how their role can be developed to be more proactive in providing increased support in:
- The recruitment of new carers
 - Carers going through the complaints/allegation process
 - Carers with complex placements
 - New carers within the service
 - Training and advice on the career development of carers
 - Monthly workshop/support groups with fostering social workers and Development Officer.
- 4.6 The existing five liaison carer roles will be maintained, with one being dedicated to relative carers and the other four to general carers. When the numbers of general carers further increases, an additional general liaison carer role will be considered.

Training

- 4.7 A pre-assessment course (Skills to Foster) is currently offered to new applicants going through the three day assessment process. Within the first 12 months following approval, foster carers are expected to attend a series of one or two day training

courses, offered in-house, identified as 'essential core training'. Currently both relative and general carers are involved in the 'skills to foster' training but post approval the general foster carers follow a 'mandatory' programme of training, whilst relative carers are provided with the opportunity to attend training but their learning needs are more usually met on a one to one basis, with their fostering link social worker.

- 4.8 In line with fostering regulations and good practice guidelines, all newly approved foster carers are reviewed within 12 months. During their second year they are offered a series of training such as child development, which is organised by Social Care Workforce Development Programme (SCWDP) and often involves the external commissioning of training in specialist areas.
- 4.9 General foster carers are offered a chance to attend Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) or equivalent training and this is linked to their payments. Following enrolment on such training they move up from Level 1 to level 2. This is not available to relative carers as they receive allowances only.
- 4.10 A review of both relative and general foster carers has been undertaken as part of this project. A number of short and long term proposals have been made with regards to improving the quality of training for foster carers. These are detailed below.
- 4.11 In the short term, the Skills to Foster course will be reshaped to align with the directorate-wide training programme that is being implemented as part of the remodelling Looked After Children's Residential, Placements and Support Services project, ensuring consistency and a common therapeutic approach across all services.
- 4.12 In the longer term, it is proposed that consideration be given to strengthening Bridgend's in-house training for foster carers, through the development and delivery of in-house courses that help foster carers to better support children and young people. This may include:
- Fostering Foundation Course (5 days- consisting of core training)
 - Child Development Course (8 days - Brain Based, Attachment, Resilience and Trauma model)
 - All Wales induction framework for Health and social care (this will be introduced 2019)
 - Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (PACE) Course
 - Development and introduction of Specific courses for relative carers
- 4.13 Stronger links will be made between the Social Care Development Workforce Programme team and the newly appointed Development Officer in the Fostering Team. This will enhance the development and production of a new training skills programme to better equip foster carers for the future.

Payments and fees

- 4.14 There are currently three levels within the payment and fee structure for carers. Foster carer payments consist of two elements: part one is an age based allowance for each child placed; part two is a fee which is based on the level of competence (skill) of the carer and the completion of core training. Immediately post approval,

both relative and general carers are placed on level one which is payment of allowance only.

- 4.15 After 12 months, following a successful review and the completion of core training, general carers are able to rise to level 2 and receive fostering fees commensurate to this status. General foster carers are able to progress further to level 3 and a further increase in fee following completion of prescribed training courses.
- 4.16 It is proposed that, in order to be competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), the Authority needs to pay fees to general carers at an earlier stage in their fostering career. The recommendation is that they receive a fee post approval, with the expectation they complete the core training programme within their first year.
- 4.17 In terms of upskilling foster carers and as part of the fee eligibility process the criteria for receiving higher fees (level 2-3) will also include attendance at support groups.
- 4.18 This will be implemented as soon as possible in order to attract new carers, and that current carers are provided with a two year transitional period to align themselves with the new fee requirements before the changes are fully implemented.
- 4.19 Work has been undertaken to benchmark Bridgend's fees and allowances by comparison with neighbouring authorities. The work undertaken with the fee element paid to carers, is reasonably competitive with only a 3-6% variation when cross referenced with regional local authorities to include Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Independent providers including TACT and Action For Children. The review has also focussed on the allowance element paid by local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies and it is these allowances that require a full review.
- 4.20 In addition to the fee that foster carers receive for a child they are also awarded an allowance which is related to the living expenses for that child. On the advice of the National Fostering Framework, Bridgend Council consolidated an amount for birthdays and 'special events' into the main allowance. During the recent engagement events with foster carers they expressed disappointment with this as they preferred to receive a 'lump sum' at the time of the birthday/event. The National Fostering Framework is now reviewing, again, all payments and allowances and Bridgend will make sure that we can contribute to this review and process.

Bonuses

- 4.21 It is proposed that carers are offered a £250 bonus when they refer a friend to be a foster carer for Bridgend. This bonus will be paid when that new carer is approved and they receive their first placement. This should encourage more of our carers to recommend people that they know.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

- 4.22 Bridgend has 279 children living within a fostering placement. This number comprises of 58 children placed with IFA Providers, 156 with in-house carers and 65 placed with Relative (kinship) carers. This indicates that BCBC has a reliance on IFAs to provide 16% of fostering placements. During this project we have analysed Bridgend's use of IFA placements to gain a better understanding of gaps in our in-house provision. As a result of this review, a number of changes have been made as described below:

- A new process to review IFA placements that have been in place less than 16 weeks has been implemented, with a view to transferring as many of these placements as possible in-house. Reviews of these placements are carried out by the Placements Team Manager, who is able to link with Safeguarding teams to discuss individual care and support plans and thereby prioritise those children who are in a position to move back into a local authority placement.
- A long-term marketing campaign led by the new Development Officer (see below) will be implemented, aimed at maximising the number of in-house foster carers, as opposed to using more costly IFA carers.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)

- 4.23 Following the introduction of the new Special Guardianship Orders regulations and 'Code of Practice guidelines' by Welsh Government in July 2018, Bridgend's Special Guardianship Policy has been reviewed.
- 4.24 It was identified following the release of this guidance that the remit for Special Guardianship Orders would be better placed within the Fostering Team. Therefore two members of social work staff who are responsible for promoting and assessing potential Special Guardianship Order applicants are now situated within this team.
- 4.25 Following the transfer of these staff members to the Fostering Team, a plan is in place to undertake a full review of how Bridgend promotes and encourages applications from foster carers to apply for SGO's and the processes and procedures that underpin this. The aim of this work will be to transfer placements to SGOs as early as possible and to reduce the use of relatives as foster carers.

Recruitment of carers

- 4.26 A business case has been successfully approved for the recruitment of a Development Officer and additional assessing social work capacity for the Fostering Team. The appointments of these posts are underway.
- 4.27 The Development Officer will be directly involved in a number of activities that will enable the proposals above to be effectively and efficiently implemented, key tasks for the Officer will include:
- Gathering further information on what IFAs provide in relation to payments & training
 - Developing and increasing frequency and breadth of campaigns
 - Working with the Liaison Carers to get them more involved in recruitment
 - Consulting with the designated member of the communications team to create an innovative marketing campaign to attract new foster carers
 - Focusing on recruitment for other campaigns such as Transitional Carers and Parent and Child, to ensure they are a success
 - Working closely with the training team and fostering team to ensure the development/delivery of the new in-house programmes
 - Developing in-house support groups and workshops

- Reducing demand on the Senior Social Workers to enable them to undertake their day-to-day duties as the service grows
- Reviewing government guidance and changes in regulation and supporting the service to translate this into policies and procedures
- Undertaking competitor analysis of other local authorities
- Researching best practice and innovations across the UK and wider
- Reviewing Bridgend's benefits packages for new carers to ensure they are effective and are encouraging people to come to Bridgend.
- Launching the targeted 'supported lodgings' recruitment campaign

Targets

4.28 The service have set the following targets to be met as a result of implementing the above changes:

- 7 in-house foster carers to be recruited in 2019/20, 8 to be recruited in 2020/21, and 9 to be recruited in 2021/22
- A reduction of 5% of IFA placements

5.0 Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules. Any future services requiring commissioning as a result of this proposal will be undertaken in-line with Contract Procedure Rules requirements.

6.0 Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 As proposals progress and officers are in a better position to know which service users and staff could be affected by the proposed model, an EIA screening (and a full EIA if necessary) will be undertaken, to assess the potential impact on service users and staff.

7.0 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

8.0 Financial Implications

Staff and service structures

8.1 No changes to staff structures identified as a result of implementing these proposals. The additional development officer post and assessing social worker post will be funded from the change fund earmarked reserve for two years. Following this period, a decision will be made on whether the posts are still required and appropriate funding identified.

8.2 Any additional training costs incurred will be funded through core budgets and SCWDWP grant where applicable.

Liaison Carers

8.3 For every additional 20 general carers recruited, one additional Liaison Carer post will be created at a cost of £4,680 per annum. However, it is envisaged that these costs will be offset by the use of the new general carers that have been recruited as opposed to utilising IFA placements.

Payments and fees

8.4 Any changes proposed would result in no immediate financial effect on the authority as additional financial output would only be relevant when new carers are recruited. The cost of this per placement would still be significantly less than the Authority would need to pay an IFA for the same placement, resulting in cost-avoidance overall.

8.5 Bonuses

Details	Cost
Cost per referral	£250
Note: Average weekly cost of an IFA placement is around £735 Maximum weekly cost of an in-house placement is £413.98 Difference = at least £321.02 Bonus cost made back within one week of placing in-house as opposed to an IFA	

Targets

8.6 If all the above targets are met, this will result in the following cash savings over three year period:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	
Cost avoidance	£25,040	£50,079	£75,119	
Cost avoidance from previous years – carried over	£0	£25,040	£75,119	
Total	£25,040	£75,119	£150,238	Total cash savings: £250,397

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 The Committee is requested to note the information contained in the report and the attached Appendix.

Susan Cooper

Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing
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10.0 Contact Officers

Laura Kinsey – Head of Children’s Social Care
 01656 642314

Laura.kinsey@bridgend.gov.uk

11.0 Background documents
None