

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

8 APRIL 2021

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 this report is to :

- provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with an update (further to the report presented on 18th April 2018) regarding the progress of work undertaken on establishing a National Fostering Framework in Wales.
- provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with updated information about Bridgend Foster Care service provision and the fostering service review and developments that are underway.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective/objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:-**

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

National Fostering Framework

- 3.1 As stated previously 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 were addressed and introduced greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the existing system.
- 3.2 Phase One of the work (2015) saw the Minister for Health and Social Services endorse the proposed framework and provided funding from Welsh Government, and reflected both the scale of people's concerns and also the need to support effective change which could only be addressed at a strategic level.
- 3.3 Following a programme of engagement and consultation a Phase One report was produced and submitted to Welsh Government that set out recommendations for how the National Fostering Framework work should be taken forward. These were as follows:
- 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).
 - Introduce a national performance and resource framework aligning this with the work to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (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).
 - 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).
 - 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).
 - 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).
 - 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).
 - 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).
 - Produce a national policy framework for fostering services, to include the training and support of foster carers. (Year two).
 - 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).

- Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to Local Authority foster carers (Year three).

3.4 To support the further development of the National Framework (Phase Two) a national strategic steering group was established and a further series of consultations took place across Wales about what a 'National Fostering Framework' and its components should look like and an implementation plan was developed for 2017–2020.

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.
- Work stream 2: Introduce a national performance framework aligning this with the work being done to deliver the WCCIS.
- 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.
- Work stream 4: Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster care for children who are looked after.
- Work stream 5: Develop national arrangements for commissioning of all placements regardless of the sector and building on the work of the 4 Cs
- Work stream 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.
- Work stream 7: Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.

3.6 Phase 3 commenced in 2017 and regional development managers were appointed throughout Wales to engage with the national work streams and coordinate plans for delivery in their areas. Swansea hosted this post for Western Bay.

3.7 The work programme at that time is outlined below:

- Work stream 1: Create capacity for an extended National Adoption Services central team to provide the co-ordination and leadership for the National Fostering Framework (NFF).
- Work stream 2: Development of Regional work programmes based on the regional priorities identified by the national performance framework.
- Work stream 3: Implement the national performance framework across all Local Authorities to help shape the regional priorities.
- 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 stream 5: Increase capacity within the regions to respond to additional enquiries following the market activity.
- Work stream 6: develop a national approach to commissioning of fostering services:

- Work stream 7: develop consistent standards and Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care and Implementation Plan.
- Work stream 8: continue work on harmonising fees and Allowances for foster carers.
- Work stream 9: Develop a national training framework for foster carers.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 Since April 2019 Bridgend has moved from being part of Western Bay to become part of Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership/Health Board. The Regional Development Manager post for this region is hosted by Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) CBC.

4.2 To support the implementation of the National Fostering Framework across the region a strategic group has been established to provide overview and scrutiny in order to monitor the performance of the NFF work-streams at a local and regional level. The strategic group is supported by an operational group to deliver the identified priorities.

4.3 A Regional Work Programme has been agreed that supports the National Fostering Framework and has identified the following priority tasks:

- **Improve recruitment and retention of foster carers across the region**
 - April 2019 saw the launch of a regional (RCT and Merthyr (MTCBC)) foster care website and “front door” for fostering which included a new team to handle all enquiries and visits.
 - Implementation of Regional Skills to Foster started in June 2019. Bridgend continue to co-ordinate their own training but places are made available to RCT and MTCBC applicants when required.
 - During September 2020 an options paper was developed with a view to BCBC joining with its regional partners and deliver one point of contact for foster care enquiries. The Regional Front Door was approved at BCBC’s Cabinet on 9th March 2021 and “went live” from 1st April 2021.
 - A Regional Marketing Officer was appointed in March 2021 who will be responsible for developing a Marketing Strategy.
- **Implementation of new National Brand across all 3 Local Authorities**
 - A national brand (Maethau Cymru/Foster Wales) has been developed. Each Local Authority will maintain an individual identity within this, recognising the need to connect with local people. Bridgend will be known as “Maethau Pen y Bont/Foster Bridgend”.
 - To support the implementation of a national brand/identity a national website has been developed and it is anticipated that it will be launched during summer 2021. Sitting beneath and linking directly to this each Local Authority will have its own fostering webpage.
- **Develop a regional ‘Local Authority Offer’ for foster care**

- All 3 LA's have completed the national core offer template designed by the Regional Development Manager, who collated and highlighted consistencies/differences across the region.
 - Consultation taken place with all foster carers in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area to consider what would be important to them in a core offer and the region is to work towards implementing the core offer set out by the National Fostering Framework.
 - Work has been undertaken to develop a new HR policy for each LA with a view to establishing them as "Fostering Friendly Organisations."
 - Work needs to be undertaken to align current offer across the region before promoting and publicising through the website and social media.
- **Adapt the Post Approval Learning and Development (L&D) Framework to meet local needs**
 - The Regional Development Manager met with training co-ordinators in Bridgend and the Cwm Taf region during February 2019 to discuss what already exists and implementation of the national L&D framework.
 - A national launch took place in November 2019 and a Cym Taf Morgannwg launch took place with over 70 stakeholders from across the region in attendance.
 - The Framework is now operational across all three local authorities.
 - An audit/review is to take place in April 2021 to ascertain current use across the region.
- **Harmonise fees and allowances**
 - Early scoping work has been undertaken in relation to harmonising fees and allowances.
 - All three LA's have linked with the national working group for this area of development.
 - We are in the early stages of considering options that would support a Regional approach to payment of carers.
- **Develop a local performance management framework that enables reporting nationally and tells us what we want to know locally**
 - Regionally all are completing the NFF return as required.
 - Fostering team and performance leads in BCBC met with the Regional Development Manager in December 2020 to look at embedding the performance framework.
 - BCBC have aligned the initial visit and recruitment process with RCTCBC and MTCBC.
 - Further work is required to embed other elements of the new NFF return and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) tool onto WCCIS.
- **Develop regional principles for Fostering panel**
 - A working group considered the options for a Regional Approach in respect of the Foster Panel. The Working group decided against full regionalisation of the Panel,

but agreed to align the recruitment and appraisals process for panel members, share training and good practice and share foster carers (on the Panel) mutually across the LA's.

- Agreement reached to establish a forum for panel chairs and members to share good practice. However, as a National Forum has been established this is the preferred option that is being followed.
 - Team Managers in each local authority are to identify foster carers that would be suitable and in agreement to attend foster panel in other LA's and share their details with regional colleagues.
 - Discussion is needed with training leads to identify joint training for panel chairs.
 - Further consultation needed with fostering panels in each area to gather their views collaborative working.
 - A new scoping exercise to be undertaken to consider the potential for regional mainstream panels to be held.
- **Embed the AFA Cymru Best Practice Guidance for Kinship care across the region**
 - Identified in L&D Framework sub group in October 2018 that training for kinship carers needs development, particularly pre approval training.
 - Need to establish a separate kinship care task and finish group to align processes and practice and develop a Cwm Taf approach.
 - Regional Development Manager is currently developing pre-approval training for Kinship carers that can be used across the region.
 - Need to decide where kinship care and SGO carers fit within the development of fostering services.
 - **Communication and Collaboration with all LA's in the region**
 - Quarterly Meetings taken place since July 2019 between LA's.
 - Representation from each LA in regional task and finish groups.
 - Regional strategic group (to be held quarterly) was launched in September 2020.
 - Operational group is launching on 08.04.21 and will meet Bi-monthly

Bridgend Foster Care/ Foster Bridgend

- 4.4 Bridgend Fostering Service continues to offer a wide range of fostering services for children who need to be Looked After and this includes carers who are able to offer care to children and young people who they do not have a pre-existing relationship with and carers who are considered to be "connected persons".
- 4.5 As at 23rd March 2021 within Bridgend Foster Care there were:
- 99 approved Fostering households for general foster placements
 - 129 children placed with in-house general foster carers
 - 56 approved Connected Persons fostering households
 - 88 children placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers
 - 65 children placed with independent fostering agencies

4.6 Bridgend Fostering has faced significant challenges during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic but during this time has sought to provide on-going support to carers.

4.7 In November 2019 funding was secured to recruit 4 re-unification workers whose main aims were to:

- support foster placements at risk of placement breakdown,
- support children to transition into step down provision (from residential and out of county placements) and
- support children to be reunified into the care of their birth family

During quarters 1-3 there were some notable outcomes achieved:

- 56 Referrals received
 - 26 placement Stability
 - 23 re-unification
 - 2 transition between placements
 - 4 inappropriate referrals
- 11 cases where re-unification home has been achieved
- 3 cases where support and intervention has contributed to a plan for Special Guardianship Order
- 1 case which supported a grandmother to obtain a Child Arrangement Order
- 1 case which supported a young person to transition to a Connected Person Foster Carer
- 6 cases where placement stability was achieved
- The number of children having 3 + placement moves as at 31st December 2020 was 7.12% (6.72% 31st December 2019).

4.8 As part of Children's Services re-modelling of Residential Care in 2018 it was proposed that 6 Transitional Foster Carers would be recruited who would act as a step-down for young people coming out of the residential units before being placed in a long-term family or independent placement. They would be therapeutically trained and therefore able to address issues that occurred as a result of a transition into a different environment, increasing the chances that the long-term placement will be successful and reducing multiple placement breakdowns and reliance on out-of-county placements.

The scheme was only successful in recruiting 3 Transitional Foster Carers who were approved at the beginning of 2019 and this did have an impact upon the overall success. Since this time one of the Transitional Carers resigned and another made the decision to step down from her role as a transitional carer in order to continue to provide a long term placement to a child who was in her care.

In January 2021 a review of this scheme was undertaken, with one of the previous transitional foster carers central to and informing our discussions/decisions and we are currently seeking to recruit an additional 5 carers. It is recognised that the Transitional Foster Care Scheme plays a key role within the wider Placements

Service to reduce the number of children who need to be placed outside of BCBC and to prevent children and young people experiencing numerous placement breakdowns.

- 4.9 Bridgend's Fostering Team is also going through a re-structure at the present time with a view to continue to provide timely and high quality support to our general foster carers, whilst promoting a focus on permanence options for children and young people within their own extended family.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There are no implications on the policy framework and procedure rules arising from this report.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no direct equality implications as a consequence of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 As stated above 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 were addressed and of introduced greater consistency without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the existing system.

- 7.2 Both the regional and local work programmes seek to support BCBC Children's Services Aim that where children and young people are looked after this is done in placements that are within the local authority boundary enabling them maintain links with and access their school, GP, dentist, friends and family. These work programmes also recognise the impact on Health and Education when children and young people are placed in outside of BCBC.

- 7.3 From the outset one of the key drivers in the development of a National Fostering Framework has been the recognition that Local Authorities across Wales did not have sufficient numbers of foster carers, with sufficient support and skills to meet the increasing demand for placements for children and young people with increasingly complex needs. The work that has and continues to be undertaken is focusses on this to prevent any further deterioration in the ability of Local Authorities to meet this demand.

8. Financial implications

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

9. Recommendation(s)

- 9.1 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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Background documents: None