

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	8 MAY 2024
Report Title:	CARE INSPECTORATE WALES (CIW) INSPECTION OF FOSTER WALES BRIDGEND
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	LAURA KINSEY HEAD OF CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules
Executive Summary:	<p>Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) are the independent regulators of social care and childcare services in Wales and inspect care service providers against the requirements of relevant legislation including the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (RISCA) and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.</p> <p>CIW are required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out functions on behalf of Welsh Ministers to provide assurance on the quality and safety of services • Decide who can provide services • Inspect and drive improvement of regulated services and local authority social services • Undertake national reviews of social care services • Take action to ensure services meet legislative and regulatory requirements <p>This report provides Cabinet with information on the regulatory activity undertaken by CIW within Foster Wales Bridgend in November 2023.</p> <p>The inspections report against core themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-being • Care and Support • Leadership and Management • Environment

	<p>A summary of the inspection is contained in this report and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key findings of how we have performed against standards in our residential and domiciliary regulated services. • Activity undertaken to meet regulatory standards. • Actions to address areas of improvement
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report is being presented as an information report to Cabinet to update on the outcome of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection of Foster Wales Bridgend November 2023. The report will be accompanied by a presentation on the work of Foster Wales Bridgend to address the sufficiency issues in foster care capacity in the county borough.

2. Background

- 2.1 The inspection was conducted in line with the CIW Inspection framework for local authority fostering services, to evaluate the services' adherence to legislative and regulatory requirements, principally The Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018. The inspections are undertaken in consideration of four core themes:

- The wellbeing of individuals receiving care and support
- The quality of care and support provided to individuals.
- The leadership and management of the service
- Environment

The reports are presented with a short summary, followed by findings under these core themes.

- 2.2 Foster Wales Bridgend comprises a General Fostering and Placement Team and Kinship and Permanence Team. The General Fostering and Placement Team considers the needs of children referred to the service and finds suitable care provisions, either in-house or externally. General foster carers are assessed and approved to look after children, providing respite, short and long-term care. The service has one parent and baby carer and one family link carer. The Kinship and Permanence team assess and approves connected carers, who are usually friends or family members of children. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 77 approved general foster carers caring for 103 children and 71 approved connected persons carers, caring for 111 children.
- 2.3 During the inspection the inspectors review a range of information including policies, statements of purpose, written guides, complaints information, incident reports, supervision data, training data, safeguarding referrals and quality assurance reports. The inspector may ask for this information to be provided electronically and uploaded onto the secure portal CIW Online.

- 2.4 All reports are initially received prior to publication from CIW along with an Inspection Response Form, which can be used to comment on the factual accuracy or the fairness and proportionality of findings within the reports.
- 2.5 There is a requirement under the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018 to have a Registered Manager for the service, which at the point of inspection was the Interim Principal Officer for Placement and Provider Services, however each Team has a Team Manager. The Registered Manager has responsibilities relating to the oversight of the adequacy of resources, making reports to the local authority provider, ensuring that there are systems in place to record complaints and ensuring that policies and procedures are kept up to date.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The report (at **Appendix 1**) identified several key strengths within the service and areas of improvement, which are being addressed via an action plan within the service. It is noted within the report that the service had recognised areas of development for the service in advance of the inspection and taken steps toward achieving these.
- 3.2 The report acknowledged the current context in which the service is operating, commenting that, *‘the number of children who are referred to the service, outnumbers foster carers available. Just over half of care experienced children within the Local Authority are provided care and support by the service. Demand on the service is high and with a limited number of vacancies, a number of general carers have been made subject to ‘exemptions’, providing care to higher numbers of children than they are approved for. Additional resources are provided to try to support these arrangements.’*

As can be seen in the table below, we have experienced a net loss of 9 fostering households and 25 foster placements. The greatest losses have arisen from an ageing foster carer population with most carers retiring or experiencing age related health concerns, followed by family commitments. There are times that placement numbers reduce or carers cease fostering for positive reasons, such as obtaining Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) for children in their care or by providing When I’m Ready placements for children.

General Foster Carer Households and Placements		
	H.HOLDS	P’MENTS
31st March 2023	84	181
31st March 2024	74	153
Totals	- 10	- 28

3.3

The local authority, including corporate parenting partners, need to promote and support the recruitment and retention of

foster carers to recruit enough foster carers to cover the losses experienced and maintain sufficient numbers of suitably skilled carers to meet the diverse needs of our care-experienced children. The local authority have put in place a Fostering Friendly policy recognising that more people will need to work alongside fostering following cost of living challenges and bedroom tax. Further detail about this will be provided in the presentation to accompany this report.

- 3.4 The local authority has enhanced the support available to foster carers utilising grant funding to upskill the fostering team via training, embedding a behaviour analyst

within the service and will shortly be advertising additional roles within the service. These include additional Placement Support Workers who provide tailored support to foster carers and the creation of an Intensive Placement Support Team who will provide wrap around support (including out of hours) to families and carers supporting children who may otherwise require Residential Placements.

3.5 Identified Strengths

The service provides an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. It anticipates, identifies, and meets the Welsh language and cultural needs of people who use, or may use, the service.

Wellbeing – Children receive information about the care, support and opportunities available to them, including how their voices are heard and how to raise a complaint. Children's views and voices are heard in several ways, and they are supported to access advocacy. The Bridgend Youth Voice Forum has provided opportunities for children to be involved in the development of the service and the recruitment and selection processes of staff. Children are supported to be healthy and active with several events for foster families taking place over the year. The Multi Agency Permanency Support Service (MAPSS) assesses the needs of children and provides a range of interventions for children and their carers to support processing of past experiences. Children are supported to attend education and reach their potential. Children are supported to have healthy, safe relationships with people important to them and several children have been able to remain living with their carers under 'When I'm Ready' arrangements.

Care and Support – Standards of care and support foster carers must provide are set out clearly within the statement of purpose, policies, and procedures for the service. The suitability of placements with connected persons are considered fully within their assessments which are completed quickly to avoid delay for children. The General fostering team undertakes matching of children's needs with foster carers and support colleagues to ensure information is suitably detailed to enable the best possible matches. The placement planning meeting that takes place within the matching process considers children's history and needs and how these will be met in placements and ensures transitions are planned. Foster carers receive regular supervision that considers children's integration into family life and how they are supported to achieve wellbeing. Most foster carers advised the inspectors that they have positive relationships with their social workers, some have been impacted by changes in workers in the team. Unannounced visits are undertaken in compliance and the placement stability process in place is having a positive impact.

Environment – The office premises (Civic Offices) is suitable and fit for purpose as the fostering service has its own designated area which allows enough distance from others to maintain confidentiality and meeting room access. The building is secure, and records are securely stored. Foster Carers' homes are assessed and monitored routinely via announced and unannounced visits with action taken to address issues as soon as they arise. Appropriate checks are undertaken as part of foster carers' annual reviews and children are able to have a say in how their bedrooms are decorated to personalise them. The local authority has also supported families to make adaptations to their homes to meet the needs of children.

Leadership and Management – The service has identified areas for development and updated policies and procedures prior to inspection to address these shortfalls. Safe recruitment checks are carried out with all staff and the Signs of Safety model is being embedded within the service. There are arrangements in place for oversight and quality assurance of the service with Quality of Care and quarterly reports identifying patterns and considering actions to improve outcomes for children. Feedback from carers about their support is mixed with almost half reporting they have good levels of support and most feel communication has improved since permanent team managers have been in post. The carers value use of social media to communicate. The liaison carer role is highly valued and supports recruitment and out of hours support. Carers value the events held over the year that support their wellbeing and retention. Assessments and annual reviews are detailed and scrutinised by the Foster Panel to ensure they are thorough. Foster carers receive training and advice to support delivered in a variety of ways and support groups offer additional peer support.

3.6 Areas of Improvement and Priority Actions Notices

The Inspection noted a number of areas of improvement which will be considered when a further inspection is undertaken in a year's time (this is anticipated to be November 2024 as the inspection visits took place during November 2023).

Regulation	Summary
3	The Local Authority service provider must have clear arrangements for the oversight and governance of the service to establish, develop and embed a culture which ensures that the best possible outcomes are achieved for children using the service and to meet the requirements of the Regulations.
10 (4)	The Local Authority provider must put arrangements in place to ensure that the service is provided in accordance with its policies and procedures.
13	The Local Authority provider must ensure that foster parents give care and support to a child placed with them in a way which maintains, protects and promotes the safety and well-being of the child.
15	The Local Authority provider must have effective arrangements in place to monitor and review the obligations placed upon foster carers as set out in the foster care agreement.
19	The local authority provider must put arrangements in place to ensure that children placed by it are safe and are protected from abuse, neglect and improper treatment.
20 (3)	The local authority provider must ensure that its safeguarding policies and procedures are operated effectively.
41 (1)	The Local Authority provider must ensure foster carers receive the support, training, and information necessary to enable them to provide care and support to a child they foster.
41 (3)	The local authority provider must ensure prospective foster parents receive such training, information and advice as is considered necessary.

3.7 Specific areas of improvement identified within the report and the actions taken to address these can be found in **Appendix 2**. The areas of improvement broadly cover the following 4 areas:

- **Matching**

It was noted that too many carers are being asked to look after children with complex issues, often in emergency situations, and consequently going over numbers (through the exemption process). This can result in children not being well matched and carers' resilience being impacted upon.

The service had developed a matching process in recognition of these needs prior to inspection to evidence decision making and management oversight. At the point of the inspection the process had not been embedded fully into the service, therefore whilst the process was felt to be of good quality, there was no evidence to support its consistent use within the recording system. A long-term placement matching process needs to be developed in partnership with children's social work teams and will be developed over the next quarter.

- **Safer caring**

There need to be more robust safe care arrangements that consider all members of the household and are explicit regarding how placements are supported.

The service approach to safe care has been to complete a new safe care agreement for each individual child. Since the inspection the process to accompany the updated arrangements has been developed in consultation with staff, system integration compliance and updated safer care agreements are now in place that consider the needs of the household.

- **Responding to allegations /safeguarding**

It was identified that foster carers who have experienced an allegation have an updated annual review and return to foster panel in a timely manner. It was highlighted that there was a need for consistency in approach, records of decision making and safeguards on file.

An audit has been undertaken by the Quality Assurance Officer for the local authority with recommendations as to how to improve practice. Workshops will be scheduled across teams to ensure the processes regarding allegations against foster carers is fully understood. Within the service mandatory training has taken place in February and a significant events form developed to support the recording of safeguarding issues, actions taken and decision making. Team Managers are live to the requirements for foster carers to return to Foster Panel following an allegation and discussions have taken place with individual staff members about compliance.

- **Policies and Procedures**

Whilst the inspectors can see that policies and procedures for the service are in place their use was not evident in recordings owing to their recent implementation. It was noted that the recording systems used needed development to enable managers to have sufficient oversight to enable compliance.

A dedicated team meeting has taken place to cover policies and procedures for the service and the local authority Policy Officer attended to ensure all staff members are clear how to use the intranet to access these documents. A separate action plan has been developed with business support and ICT partners to align the system and

develop dashboards for Team Managers to support their oversight and enable them to monitor compliance.

- 3.8 The areas for improvement are being addressed and achievement of the actions is monitored through regular Silver Management and Performance Meetings undertaken with the Head of Children's Services and Corporate Director of Social Services and Wellbeing.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.
- 4.2 Despite no equality impact assessment being conducted the information contained in the report positively describes the use of the Active Offer of the Welsh Language.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), 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.
- 5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:
- Long Term – Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable prevention and wellbeing outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, because of rising demographics and increasing complexity, the remodeling and transformation of services continues to be a priority.
 - Prevention – the report is about the new approaches adopted by the Directorate in line with the SSWBA, for example, the provision of support services to promote placement stability for children. This will ensure that need is anticipated and resources can be more effectively directed to better manage demand.

- Integration – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, particularly the NHS and the Police, to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided.
- Collaboration – The support of Corporate Parenting partners is key when delivering support to care experienced children population. Strategic partnerships are required to enable timely access to support services as well as the promotion of recruitment and retention of sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of our children.
- Involvement – the key stakeholders are the people who use social care. There is evidence within the report of the service having good systems in place to ensure that care experienced children's voices are heard, recorded, and sought out to aid the development of the service.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no climate change implications associated with this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 It is a regulatory requirement that BCBC's Safeguarding Policy meets Part 8 of The Regulated Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2017 which is to ensure service providers have in place the mechanisms to safeguard vulnerable individuals to whom they provide care and support. This includes arrangements that:

- Support vulnerable individuals using the service
- Support and underpin staff knowledge, understanding and skill in identifying risks and action to take where abuse, neglect or improper treatment is suspected or identified; and
- Ensure the service provider works collaboratively with partners to prevent and take action where abuse, neglect or improper treatment is suspected or identified

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee is recommended to note the outcome of the CIW Inspection of Foster Wales Bridgend and the work that is progressing which will be presented to Committee to improve sufficiency of foster carers in the county borough.

Background documents

None