

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

13 APRIL 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

UPDATE ON PROGRESS MADE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF IN-HOUSE FOSTER CARERS AND PLACEMENTS WITHIN BRIDGEND

1. Purpose of Report.

To provide Cabinet Committee with an update in respect of the progress made to increase the number of in house foster carers and placements within Bridgend, highlighting significant achievements made during this financial year.

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

2.1 The report links to the following corporate priorities:

- Working together to raise ambitions and to drive up educational achievements
- Working with children and families to tackle problems early
- Working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent
- Working together to tackle health issues and encourage healthy lifestyles

3. Background

3.1 Bridgend CBC has a clear corporate parenting responsibility to ensure that its Looked After Children (LAC) population wherever possible, and when it is safe to do so are looked after within their local community where they will maintain family contacts and have their cultural, social, health and educational needs promoted.

In order to increase the number of in-house foster carers to provide more placements to Bridgend's LAC population, Bridgend Foster Care (BFC) has a clear marketing plan for the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The plan is based on providing immediate and positive responses to people applying to become Local Authority foster carers, offering placements to local children. There are bespoke marketing campaigns targeted at recruiting foster carers for sibling groups, teenagers and disabled children based on identification of local placement need and trends.

The Local Authority has access to a dedicated marketing resource to support recruitment of foster carers and ensure that marketing is appropriately targeted. The Local Authority also has a recruitment officer based within the team to oversee the planning and management of assessments both for general foster carers and managing the court timescales and assessments for relative foster carers.

The Local Authority currently has 38 approved relative foster carer households and is focused towards working to secure permanence via legal orders other than care orders, thereby reducing the number of children placed with family who are categorised as LAC. Relative foster carers are carers who are approved specifically to look after named children within their family.

The Local Authority has 17 general in-house foster carers who are resident outside of the Local Authority's boundaries, supporting us to offer in house provision to children who have been identified as needing out of county placements.

The Local Authority has seen an increase over the past year of carers who wish to transfer from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) to the Local Authority service. This is reported to be due to the reputation of BFC and as a result of consistent positive CSSIW inspection reports. BFC also has a sound reputation amongst its foster carers for the excellent support it provides to carers from a dedicated team of professional social workers and a placement support worker. The IFA carers report that in BFC there is a better choice of placements and matching of children to households and, in some cases, better remuneration for the task they perform.

Members will be aware that in 2013 a decision was made to disband the Resolutions fostering service. Consequently existing Resolutions carers were encouraged to opt to transfer to any one of the four Resolutions partnership Local Authorities. Throughout the past year Bridgend CBC has been fortunate, through acting promptly and setting out clear guidelines and expectations in writing (for all the carers wishing to transfer), in being able to secure a significant number of the foster carers who were previously approved by the Resolutions Fostering service. Only one carer household out of 19 chose to transfer to another fostering agency (for whom they previously fostered). This has provided the Local Authority with a pool of experienced carers located within a number of Local Authorities across South Wales.

On a weekly basis, all open placement referrals are discussed and wherever possible the Local Authority seek to place children with in house provision and return children from out of county provision or IFA provision.

Every placement referral is initially scoped in respect of in-house foster carer households and only when all options have been exhausted do we consider the need to resource an IFA placement, or where the care plan necessitates that a child/ren should not be placed in house.

4. Current situation.

- 4.1 The practice in respect of relative foster carers has recently been revised so that all potential relative foster carers are subject to a Unified Assessment (UA). This provides three recommendations in respect of three types of care provision and placement options to the court, these being:
- Carers being fully approved as foster carers; meaning a specific child/ren is Looked After under the auspices of a full care order, an interim order, or with the consent of their parents under section 20 Children Act 1989.

- Carers are recommended to care for identified child/ren under the auspices of a Special Guardianship. (SGO) In these situations the child/ren would not be looked after children and consequently the Local Authority would not share parental responsibility. This is often awarded alongside a supervision order for a year so that the Local Authority has continued oversight to monitor the success of the placement.
- Carers are recommended to care for identified child/ren under the auspices of a Child Arrangement Order (CAO) meaning that the children are not looked after and the Local Authority does not share parental responsibility.

One of the key principles of the Children Act 1989 is that the Court should only make an order if it considers that doing so would be better for the child than making no order at all (section 1(5) Children Act 1989).

To ensure that every LAC has the right permanency plan in place, social workers are very proactive in their work with our existing in-house approved relative carers to encourage them to secure permanence for their fostered children via an SGO or CAO. This has resulted in the Council maintaining a relatively low number of approved relative foster carers, thirty seven at the time of writing this report. Throughout the past 12 months, eight relative foster carers have ceased to be approved relative foster carers because they were able to secure either SGO's or CAO's for the children previously fostered with them. An additional two children were returned home to their natural parents. In addition there are currently seven relative foster carers who are actively pursuing permanence orders in respect of 13 children. We consider this to be a significant achievement.

- 4.2 As stated above, BFC benefitted from the transfer of a number of former Resolutions foster carers which together provide 22 foster placements.
- 4.3 Over the last twelve months, BFC has been successful in achieving a steady increase in the number of general foster carers approved, approving an additional 12 carer households offering a further 17 placements to children.
- 4.4 Over the last twelve months BFC has also been successful in achieving a steady increase in the number of general IFA foster carers who have transferred to BFC. During this financial year, 8 former IFA carers have transferred to BFC, offering 22 placements.
- 4.5 Since March 2014 there has been a net increase of 28 foster carer households offering an additional 55 placements.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 This has been considered but as there are no new or changed services or policy functions in this report it is therefore not applicable.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 This has been considered but as the report is for information purposes, an assessment is not deemed necessary.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 A number of savings have been achieved as a result of the transfer of a number of former IFA carers to Bridgend Foster Care. The table below illustrates these savings resulting in a weekly equivalent saving of £3,382.80. For 2014/15 the actual saving amounted to £60,331 due to the varying dates of transfer throughout the year.

Name	Placements equating to savings	Saving per week £	Saving Realised 2014/15 £
Couple 1	1 LT placement in place	342.72	12,337.92
Carer 2	1 placement	353.07	9,885.96
Couple 3	3 placements	1,253.03	30,072.72
Couple 4	1 placements (long term)	286.99	6,887.76
Couple 5	1 LT placement	305.22	305.22
Couple 6	2 x LTFP (reason for transfer)	841.77	841.77
TOTAL		3,382.80	60,331.35

7.2 In addition to the above significant savings have been realised as a result of an additional 10 children either moving from IFA placements to in house foster care or as a result of children moving from residential care to foster care or as a result of former IFA foster carers transferring to Bridgend Foster Care often bringing their fostered children with them. The table below illustrates these savings resulting in a weekly equivalent saving of £9,920.74. For 2014/15 the actual total saving amounted to £116,565.70 due to the varying dates of transfer throughout the year.

Placements coming in house since April 1st 2014;

Initials of child	Where placed	Saving per week £	Saving Realised 2014/15 £
Child 1	BCBC Foster Carers	389.74	7,405.06
Child and Mother 1	BCBC Foster Carer	423.93	8,902.53
Child 2	Placed with maternal aunt (sec 38.6)	570.81	19,170.42
Child 3	BCBC Foster Carers	1,077.25	34,472.00
Child 4	In House Residential - Sunnybank	796.56	5,575.92
Child and Mother 2	BCBC Foster Carers	668.67	7,355.37
Child and Mother 3	Placed with Family (sec 38.6)	1,107.78	19,940.04
Child 5	BCBC Foster Carers	331.03	4,634.42
Child 6	In House Residential - Sunnybank	4,554.97	9,109.94
TOTAL		9,920.74	116,565.70

The tables above evidence the savings that have been achieved over the last financial year. Members can be assured that Bridgend Foster Care will continue its strong drive to recruit more in house foster carers, where it is appropriate to do so, reduce its reliance on IFA placements and where appropriate, return children place out of authority placements to our in house provision.

In the current context of the financial pressures on Looked After Children budgets work to achieve efficiencies across the range of placements will be key to reducing the total spend on this budget area. The latest projections anticipate a £500,000 cost pressure over budget for Looked After Children, the savings identified above have helped to reduce this from a potentially higher over-spend position.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 That Cabinet Committee notes the content of this report and continues to support the valuable work that Bridgend Foster Care delivers to Bridgend's LAC population.

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