

Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service

Quality of Care Report 2015/2016

(Regulation 42 Fostering Regulations (Wales))

Background

The purpose of this report is to meet the requirements of Regulation 42 of the Fostering Regulations (Wales) 2003 which sets out the duty of the Fostering Service to report the mechanisms for data monitoring and reporting on the quality of care they provide to children who are looked after.

Developments in the service

Children and Young People Services in NPT has continued to see improvements in its workforce stability and service delivery over the past year. The service continues to be driven by its strategic development plan.

In 2015 a number of key strategies were introduced which influenced service delivery. As a result the following have been embedded into practice:

- The quality assurance framework is embedded with a programme of Audit being undertaken by managers across the service on a monthly basis. The lesson learning from audit is monitored with the support of the training and development department and links to training. The fostering service has developed its own audit tools which will be used to monitor regulatory compliance requirements as well as monitoring the quality of care and service provision. There are regular peer review meetings which focus on practice improvements as well as promoting multi agency working.
- NPT has participated in the SSIA Outcomes pilot. Training is being rolled out across all service areas including the Fostering Service.
- The Family Support Strategy has provided a targeted approach to supporting children, young people and their families. The re-commissioning of services has promoted an emphasis on prevention of placement breakdown, and supporting young people on the edge of care.
- An engagement and participation strategy and the appointment of an engagement and participation officer has seen a coordinated approach to supporting young peoples and ensuring that their voices are heard.
- A Looked After Children's Strategy has ensured a safe and measured approach to reducing the number of Looked After Children.

Looked After Children

Actual numbers of LAC

	31.03.11	31.03.12	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15	31.3.15
Number of Looked After Children	411	472	493	467	434	377

The Looked after Children's Strategy set out a commitment to reduce the number of children who are looked after by 26% by 2018 as indicated in the table below. A commitment was given to reducing the actual number of Looked After children to 411 by 31st March 2016. Children's Services has exceeded this target, with the actual number reducing to 377.

Projected numbers of LAC

Financial year	Projected Number of LAC	Reduction	Rate of LAC per 10,000 population
2013/14	467 (actual)		168
2014/15	441	-26	158
2015/16	411	-30	148
2016/17	371	-40	133
2017/18	345	-26	124

The reduction of Looked After Children has been achieved through the following:

- Changes to the way we support children and young people on the edge of care.
- Strengthening the procedures for admission to care.
- The development of a resource panel.
- Improved planning and monitoring arrangements.
- Improved the opportunities for children to have permanency outside of the care system.
- Ensuring that where children are looked after that they receive a high quality service and wherever possible supporting rehabilitation back to family.

Having achieved this reduction to date, there is a need to ensure the continued drive to reducing the numbers further.

Type of placement

	31.03.11	31.03.12	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15	31.3.16
Neath Port Talbot Carers	186	176	169	172	167	158
NPT Family + Friends Carers	63	64	76	74	67	50
Independent Fostering	100	141	131	117	105	75
Independent Living	2	5	7	5	8	3
Pre-adoption	14	26	38	28	18	31
Placed with Parent	27	34	51	56	59	48

Residential/Educ.	17	23	19	14	10	12
Mother and Baby Placement*	1	3	2	0	0	0
Secure Unit	1	0	0	0	0	2
Child in Hospital	0	0	0	1	0	1

There has been a significant reduction in the number of young people placed with Independent Foster carers in 2015/16. There has however been a slight rise in the number of young people placed in a residential provision and in secure accommodation. Although small in number the impact of this type of placement on outcomes for children and young people as well as the financial impact is significant, and the service needs to consider how it can develop alternative provision and support to ensure young people can, wherever possible and appropriate be placed in a family setting.

Number of Children becoming looked after and leaving the LAC system

	31.03.11	31.03.12	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15	31.3.16
Admissions	137	198	145	120	108	73
Discharges	119	137	124	146	128	130

2013/14 saw a change in the trend of the number of admissions and discharges, with the number of children leaving care overtaking the number coming into care.

Placement stability

	31.03.11	31.03.12	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15	31.3.16
Number of children who have had 3 or more placements in a year	35 out of 411	30 out of 472	44 out of 493	30 out of 467	30 out of 434	33 out of 377
Percentage	8.5%	6.4%	8.9%	6.4%	6.9%	8.7%

There has been a slight rise in the number of children who experienced 3 or more changes of placement from the previous 2 years.

It is important to note that the figures for placement moves include planned moves in addition to placement breakdowns. Some moves may be to permanent placements such as pre-adoptive placements or placements to family members. We recognise that the key to stability is the support we offer to placements, which helps young people understand why they are looked after and supports carers to manage difficult situations. It is important that further work is undertaken to understand the reasons for the placement breakdowns in order to develop services and carers skills to reduce the number of children who move between placements.

Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

Towards the end of 2015/16 a draft Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy was developed with the aim of profiling the carers approved by Neath Port Talbot, the children in placement and to highlight the areas of the service which need to be further developed.

The Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy identified that although the numbers of Looked After Children placed in independent foster care had significantly reduced, over half of the remaining were children aged 11 plus. The available placements for young people over the age of 11 within the pool of Neath Port Talbot carers was very low, with only a very small number of placements being available. Of those available careful matching was required due to needs of other young people placed.

In contrast, due to the impact of preventative services and a confidence in practice, the number of young children being accommodated has reduced resulting in an increased number of vacancies for foster carers approved to look after younger children, in particular those aged 0-5.

The recruitment strategy reviewed the payments made to Neath Port Talbot foster carers with the aim of ensuring that the service was able to offer a competitive level of financial support in the local market. The review of finances identified that in order to promote the recruitment of carers to look after children over the age of 11, that there needed to be an increase in foster carer fees for this age range. The proposal to increase foster carers fees for the age 11 plus carers will be taken forward in 2016/17.

In addition to financial support, the Fostering Recruitment Strategy identified the need to further support foster carers and young people to increase placement stability. This will prevent the number of young people who move between foster placements due to their complex and challenging behaviour. In 2016/17 the service will consider how additional support could be provided through the introduction of clinical support and supervision of foster placements. The service will explore how a joint arrangement with Hillside Secure Unit could support young people with complex needs who are currently unable to access support through core services due to their ineligibility for Cahms Services. .

Foster Carer Information

The table below shows that the number of enquiries to the service from potential carers has again decreased in 2015/16, a trend that has continued to decline over the past 5 years. This continued downward trend reflects the current National Data. Given this, it is positive that the service has managed to continue to achieve its targets for reducing the number of Looked After Children and for reducing the number of children placed in independent foster placements, however it would be a significant cause for concern if this trend continued.

Towards the end of the 2015/16 the service refocused its recruitment to applications for teenage placements. Applications for potential carers for children age 0-5 are now being put on hold, as the current resources easily meets the demand. Some existing carers for children aged 0-5 are experiencing periods where they have no child in placement. Work is being undertaken to support foster carers who have vacancies to consider changing their approval status to consider caring for older children.

Enquiries to Fostering Service

Period	Total household Enquiries
2015-2016	55
2014-2015	64
2013 – 2014	81
2012 – 2013	95
2011 - 2012	113

Number of approved Neath Port Talbot foster carers

	31.03.11	31.03.12	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15	31.3.16
Foster Carer	132	126	129	140	139	137
Foster Carer Plus (* see 7.3)	7	7	7	5	5	4
Relative Carer	63	73	73	67	56	42
Total	202	206	209	212	200	183

Number of Neath Port Talbot placements available

	31.03.11	31.03.12	31.03.13	31.03.14	31.3.15	31.3.16
Foster Carer	248	238	243	259	250	232
Foster Carer Plus	9	9	9	6	6	6
Relative Carer	84	94	101	93	63	52
Total	341	341	353	358	309	290

De-registrations

Period	Mainstream Carers	Family and Friends Carers	Total
2015-2016	11	21*	32
2014-2015	9	3	11
2013 – 2014	13	4	17
2012 – 2013	16	9	25

2011 – 2012	19	0	19
2010 - 2011	2	3	5
2009 - 2010	2	19	21

*The rise in the number of family and friends carers being deregistered reflects the increase in the number of carers who have been granted Special Guardianship Orders.

Pre –approval training

We continue to hold 4 training sessions a year which are jointly run with our neighbouring authority Foster Swansea. All potential applicants are required to attend the training which takes place over either 3 full days or 2 full day and 2 evening sessions. In 2014/15 28 NPT applicants attended the training.

Fostering Panel

The Foster Panel met on 15 occasions. Artie Meakin, a very experienced chair and practitioner in Adoption and Fostering remains the independent chair for Fostering Panel.

Membership of the Foster Panel comprises:

Ms A Meakin	Panel Chairperson
Ms Jo Goodwin	Panel Professional Advisor
Dr D Dyer	Medical Advisor
Mrs A Brown	Independent
Mr G Clifford	Independent
Ms D Hallatt	Independent
Ms S Prosser	Independent/Vice Chair
Ms G Jones	Social Worker
Ms H Pope	Social Worker
Mrs A Hinton	Education
Cllr. Peter Richards	Elected Member

Financial Support

Child based allowances

Payments are made in line with the Welsh Government Guidelines for National Minimum Payments for foster carers. The amount of payment is related to the age of the child in placement and is payable for each child placed. Payments include pocket money and clothing allowance. In addition a holiday allowance, Christmas/religious ceremony, and birthday allowance is paid.

Carer fees

A weekly fee is payable to mainstream foster carers for each child placed. Carers receive an enhanced fee when they have obtained post approval qualifications of diploma or NVQ. In 2015/16 a review of foster carer finances was undertaken. As a result in the next financial year proposals will be taken forward to increase the foster carers fee for those carers who provide a placement to children over the age of 11. This proposal aims to support the recruitment of foster carers for teenagers in order to reduce the number of teenagers who are placed with Independent Foster Carers.

A consultation will be undertaken in 2016/17 to review the current arrangements of paying foster carers a holiday allowance as an annual payment rather than as a weekly payment. This arrangement was established at the request of carers following the implementation of the National Minimum Payments by Welsh Government in 2011, but needs to be reviewed to ensure compliance with the arrangements.

'Foster Plus' Scheme

At March 2016 there are 2 approved parent and baby foster carers and 3 foster carers who are approved for named children within the Foster Plus Scheme. Foster Plus was established to provide foster placements to older children and children with complex needs, who may otherwise be placed in placements external to Neath Port Talbot.

Foster Plus carers receive an enhanced carer fee per week per child (in addition to child allowances) in recognition of the additional support and tasks required to be undertaken.

The Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy recognises that there is a need for a specialist scheme for a small number of children who have significant and complex needs. Going forward the eligibility for Foster Plus carers will be based on the assessed skills of the carers to meet the needs of children with complex and challenging needs. It is recognised that some children who have complex needs may require specialist services to meet these needs e.g. some children with significant and complex disabilities. In these circumstances there may be a continued need to commission specialist carers to meet these needs.

Permanence

In addition to Looked After Childrens Reviews children's permanency plans are considered at a permanency panel. The aim of the panel is to ensure that all children have an effective

permanency plan which is achieved in a timely manner. Wherever possible and appropriate the aim is to seek Permanence for children outside of the Looked After Childrens system.

The fostering service has supported the rise in the number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) being granted for children. The implementation of the unified assessment in considering the most appropriate placement type has been successful in supporting children to remain with their carers without being looked after. The service has been proactive in developing support plans for SGO's which ensure that carers receive the support that they receive. Carers who are granted SGO's are able to maintain contact with and support from the service and are offered the ongoing opportunity to access support groups and training.

When I Am Ready

Neath Port Talbot has recently implemented a When I Am Ready Policy and Guidance which relates to the arrangements that should be considered when a young person wishes to remain living with their foster carers when they become 18. The Policy will be operational from 6th April 2016, and provides details on the planning that is required in advance of the young person turning 18 as well as the financial arrangements that will be required.

In 2016/17 the Local Authority will recruit a When I Am Ready officer post to support the implementation of the scheme as well as to provide an additional support to When I Am Ready carers.

Recruitment and Retention of Foster carers

Recruitment Activity

The Fostering service utilises social media as a means of raising the profile of the service. The NPT fostering website is updated on a regular basis, and has received an increase in the number of visitors. The use of social media enables the service to reach a wide audience and target a demography who may be interested in pursuing fostering as a career.

The service has continued to air radio adverts with a particular focus on teenage placement, sibling groups and parent and baby placements. The service tries to ensure a good visual presence within the local community by advertising in family events; fun days; linking in with a local rugby club and advertising at their games and in the ground, and through the yellow pages and yell.com.

In the past year the fostering service has introduced 'Ziggy', the NPT fostering mascot as a means of further creating a face of fostering within the community. Ziggy, a 7 foot mascot provides a strong visual presence at marketing events and has been animated for use in on-line advertising and on social media, as well as on bus stops and bill boards across NPT.

A programme of recruitment events has run throughout the 2015/16 across the borough of Neath Port Talbot.

NPT fostering service works closely with Fostering Network and during its National Foster Care Fortnight campaign Neath Port Talbot was one of 6 Local Authorities across the UK

who organised a Foster Walk to raise awareness of fostering. The event received coverage through local radio station Nation Hits, and an article was published in the Fostering Network magazine.

There is an urgent need to develop a strong, visual and powerful marketing campaign in order to attract new carers to Neath Port Talbot. The proposals within the recruitment strategy to enhance support and a competitive foster carer fee will add strength to the ability to publicise Neath Port Talbot fostering as an attractive option for those who wish to consider being a foster carer. The Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy has provided a profile of carers and Looked After Children in Neath Port Talbot. Once approved, it will provide a platform for the development of a new marketing strategy.

Training programme for approved carers

A training programme is run throughout each year and includes core training as well as more advanced and specialist programmes. The fostering service is represented at the Fostering Network Training Forum.

We hold weekly training sessions “Training Tuesdays”. Each session is held between school hours, with high quality crèche facilities provided for children below school age. All sessions are held at a fixed venue. The training officer has an open door approach allowing easy access to sessions. This enables foster carers to engage in appropriate training in line with changing placements and shifting needs. It does not fix carers on a training path following initial annual training application; it allows flexibility and is responsive. The structure of the programme comprises of monthly themes such as; Core Training Month, Working with Teens Month, Education Month etc. In 2015/16 the training programme has developed to include information about NPS (new psychoactive substances) to assist carers in learning more about ‘legal highs’ and substance misuse.

Carers have been involved in restorative practice training which places an emphasis on working with people and supporting them to make changes rather than doing things on their behalf.

Out of Hours Programme

In addition to the main training schedule, we have an Out of Hours Programme. All core training is delivered throughout the year on a Saturday morning and via twilight sessions. This programme targets our harder to reach carers, who may work during the week day.

Diploma Training Programme

The Diploma Programme is delivered through a series of 18 workshops. Carers are registered to complete the Health and Social Care Diploma (Children and Young People) Level 3 in cohorts. There is a current cohort of 14 Foster Carers completing their diploma qualification. Where foster carers have required additional learning support to complete the Diploma this has been made available.

Advanced Training Programme

The advanced training programme is open to carers who have completed all core training and the Health and Social Care Diploma (Children and Young People) Level 3. The first part of the programme – Child Psychology, has been completed, and a new group of carers will start a 10 week course Introduction to Counselling Jan 2016.

Family/Friend/Carers Training Programme

All family/friend/carers are welcomed on any part of the training programme. It is recognised that this group of carers have very specific needs in addition to those recognised in main stream carers. The Family/Friend/Carers Training Programme addresses specific issues such as Managing Contact in Kinship Care.

Carers are expected to attend at least 3 training sessions per year. Participation in training is reviewed as part of the carers annual review and is monitored by the fostering panel. In order to promote attendance and to encourage learning, foster carers are supported to develop an individual learning plan either as part of their assessment or through supervision which will assist in identifying any training and development needs that they may have.

Confidence in Care

Neath Port Talbot Fostering is participating in the pilot of the *Confidence in Care* training which is being delivered through Cascade and TACT. The programme forms part of the Fostering Changes Course which was developed by South London and Maudsley Hospital Trust. It is an evidence based training course for foster carers which aims to empower them to better manage the children and young people they are looking after. The programme transforms outcomes for looked after children across Wales and NPT are participating in the evaluation of the course.

Staff training

All members of the Fostering Team complete Individual Learning Plans. The Individual Learning Plans demonstrate a commitment to a tailored response to individual staff development, setting very clear objectives for the training year.

There is a representative from the training department on the Children's Services Management Group who drives forward developments in the service. In addition there is a dedicated training officer for the fostering service. The service has been fortunate to be supported to access specialised courses linked to supporting carers and young people who are looked after.

The fostering service is involved in all of the core training within the Children and Young People Service community teams to ensure that there is a consistency in service in delivery. The fostering team will be included in the Outcomes Focussed training programme which will be implemented across the teams in 2016/17.

The assessing social workers have received specific training on assessing family dynamics which has been invaluable in supporting the validity and robustness of their assessments within the Court arena.

Consultation with Carers and young people

Carer's views are obtained through their annual reviews and through support groups and consultation events.

There is a foster carer representative who is a member of the corporate parenting panel.

Meetings have started to take place with the foster carers association to ensure that there is a direct link between the carers and the management of the service. This has been a positive way of consulting, communicating and developing the service. It is hoped that this progress will continue to develop in 2016/17 with the association being able to act as a voice of the carers.

The Children's participation and engagement officer has been extremely proactive in ensuring that young people are linked to local and National groups and organisations which focus on the voice of the young person.

In the summer of 2015 young people were involved in making a professional video which was used as part of a staff development day. The video showed young people's experiences of becoming looked after, the importance of life story work and the positive impact this can have. The video also included foster carers who spoke about their experiences of caring. The video was also shared with Members, and in 2016/17 it will be animated so that it can be shared with a wider audience as part of induction, training and recruitment whilst protecting the identity of those who participated.

A celebration event was held in March 2016 to acknowledge the achievements of all young people within Neath Port Talbot and a number of looked after children and care leavers participated in this successful event which was hosted by the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Consultation with Staff

Staff within the fostering service are consulted with as part of the annual CSSIW fostering inspection. Staff have the opportunity to participate in an annual staff survey which is undertaken across all of children's services and the business support teams.

The team managers of the fostering service are part of the Children's services management team which meets on a regular basis. Staff from within the service have the opportunity to drive forward practice through participation in the staff practice improvement group and Looked after Children's practice improvement group.

In March 2016 a survey was undertaken across Children's Services which sought to seek the views of the children's services staff on their experiences of the fostering service. The outcome of the survey will be published in 2016/17.

Support

Foster carers are allocated Fostering Social Worker who supports them and offers guidance and practical support in all areas. Through regular supervision, telephone contact and meetings are able to advise with issues on contact, allegations and placement breakdowns.

The Fostering Service has been arranged into 2 teams which work closely together. One team supports the assessment support and review of carers (including family /connected person carers and SGO carers) and the other supports the supervision and support of mainstream carers. Each team is supported by a full time manager.

In 2015 the service benefitted from the appointment of an additional supervising social worker. The post was established from within the existing fostering service budget.

The staffing in the fostering service is stable. There has been a recent change in the management of the supervising team, with the manager taking a change of career. This change was managed without disruption due to the natural progressing of the deputy manager being successfully appointed to team manager and the consultant social worker being appointed to the deputy manager position.

In March 2016 two members of the fostering team were successfully promoted to consultant social workers. In 2016/17 they will join the consultant social workers group and will start to develop their areas of speciality which will assist in promoting the quality of social work practice both within fostering and across children and young people's services.

The fostering service operates an out of hours advice line for foster carers.

Support Workers

The fostering support workers have a focus on providing practical help and support to carers in managing the needs of the children they are looking after. Their role has been revised to focus on strengthening the support to family, friends and carers and has been developed to enable them to have their own caseload in supervising family and friends carers/placements.

Special Guardianship Orders

The fostering service is responsible for the financial review of carers who have been granted a Special Guardianship Order where there are no additional support needs. Work in relation to Special Guardianship Orders is ongoing.

Specialist help and advice

Support Services have been provided to carers through commissioned services. These have included a response service to prevent placement breakdown; supports to rehabilitate children to their families in addition to specialist services from TAIH or SERAF. Where required the Local Authority has spot purchased assessments or therapeutic intervention including clinical supervision of foster placements with clinical psychologists.

In 2016/17 there will be a further focus on securing arrangements for clinical support for young people with complex needs and their carers.

Independent support for allegations against foster carers

All mainstream foster carers have membership of Fostering Network who provide counselling and legal advice via a telephone helpline and legal expenses cover. The provision of independent support is required by regulations. This can also be spot purchased for any carers not covered by this membership.

Independent Review Mechanism

All applicants or existing carers who are either not recommended for approval/re-approval or have their approval status changed have the opportunity to challenge this decision through the Independent Review Mechanism process. One of the fostering team managers has been appointed as a professional member of the IRM panel (excluding any NPT cases that are referred).

Since the last report there have been no referrals to the IRM.

Foster Care Association

The Foster Care Association has held its second AGM. The group have been proactive in trying to engage a wider audience of carers to participate. They meet regularly and have taken the opportunity to make connections with other associations across Wales. The group have organised a number of social and fundraising events and are keen to develop a peer mentoring role.

Recent meetings between the association and the senior managers has resulted in a positive agreement to take forward arrangements for improving communication between the foster carers and managers in order to drive forward service development.

The fostering service continues to provide an annual financial contribution to the Foster Carers Association, and in addition offers some administrative support.

E Care Scheme

The E Care Scheme provides computer equipment and internet access to improve communication and sharing of information between carers, children, the fostering service and social workers.

The project has continued to run over a number of years and has supported the way in which information is communicated to foster carers including; the development of a foster carers section of the NPT website in which carers can access information on policies and procedures, on call rota contact numbers and any consultation events that are happening.

Leisure Facilities

An agreement is in place with Celtic Leisure for foster carers, their own children and the children they look after and care leavers to have free use of Celtic Leisure facilities.

Letter Box Club

Neath Port Talbot Fostering continues to participate in the Letter Box Club, which is funded by Welsh Government in association with Book Trust Cymru. It focusses on improving the educational outlook of Looked After Children aged 7-11, by providing them with a parcel of books, maths activities and stationery items once every month for six months from July to December.

Children and foster carers report extremely positive feedback about the scheme and Foster carers have reported increased engagement in reading from the children/young people who have been part of the scheme.

The LetterBox Club forms part of the NPT Educational attainment Action plan which was implemented in 2014 and aims to improve the learning outcome for young people.

Support Groups

Moving children on support groups have been well attended and it has given our foster carers an opportunity to speak to other carers about the sometimes difficult and emotional side of moving children onto adoption. From the success of this particular group, there is the intention to introduce a group for foster carers own sons and daughters.

There is a successful 'Men who Care' group who meet regularly. The group has guest speakers and considers topics relevant to male foster carers. The group has been proactive in meeting with the Inspectorate and Senior managers.

A group has developed for single carers as it was identified that single carers benefit from the support networks they develop with other carers.

Quarterly newsletters were produced and distributed to carers, covering information from the service, in addition to updates on the Fostering pages on the website.

Sons & Daughters Support

The service understands the role that fostering families play in the lives of Looked After Children and that this includes foster carers own children as well as their extended families. The service consults with foster carers own children to find out what supports they feel they need and includes activity days and events that foster carers children can participate in.

Monitoring

The Fostering service has developed a range of performance management tools which assist in monitoring the quality of the service. These include reminder screens for staff to ensure

that checks, reviews and visits are completed on time, as well as notifications for children's reviews. In addition the service is able to retrieve data on the numbers of approved carers, placements, payments and training.

Under Schedule 7 and Schedule 8 of the Fostering Regulations the local authority is required to report to CSSIW on incidents related to accidents, illnesses of children and young people, medication given, incidents of restraint and any complaints or allegations.

In 2015/16 there were 4 allegations made in relation to foster carers. 2 of these allegations led to the matter being considered within a professional abuse strategy meeting. Of these, one was in relation to an incident within the carers career rather than being in relation to the fostering role. No carers were deregistered as a result of the investigations. All allegations have been concluded, and all carers continue in their fostering role.

There have been 2 complaints received from foster carers in relation to the service they feel they have received, both of which have been resolved.

In 2016/17 work will need to be undertaken to improve the monitoring arrangements for schedule 7 reporting which are currently manually collated.

Conclusion

The Looked After Children's Strategy has been successful in driving forward the Local Authorities plans to safely reduce the number of children who are looked after year by year. The challenge for the fostering service continues to be the need to increase its number of foster carers to ensure that those children who do need to be looked after can remain in their local community with skilled carers.

There has continued to be a decline in the number of people making enquiries to become foster carers and the number of foster carers being approved. This needs to be addressed urgently if changes are to be seen in the continued reduction of teenagers who are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies.

The approval of the Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy and proposed changes to the support and finance available to carers will be key to how the fostering service is able to market and recruit carers in 2016/17.

The fostering service is currently providing a high quality service to children looked after by its foster carers. The service received positive inspection feedback from the December 2016 CSSIW inspection which was based on the quality of care provided. The inspection highlighted the ongoing challenge of ensuring that there is sufficient placement choice, availability and support for children who need to be looked after and in particular children who have more complex needs.

Actions:

- To seek approval of the Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy.
- To seek approval of a revised Foster Carers Finance Policy.

- To fully implement the When I Am ready arrangements.
- To develop a Foster Carer marketing strategy.
- To develop the role of the consultant social worker to support the development of the quality of the service.
- To improve performance management arrangements for fostering.
- To develop arrangements to provide support for young people and their carers who have complex needs including clinical supervision and therapeutic services.