

Update to the 2015/16 Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service Quality of Care report

Background

The Fostering Service is required under regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations (Wales) to report annually the mechanisms for Data monitoring and quality of care that they provide for children who are looked after.

The 2015/16 Quality of Care Report was presented to Members at the Children Young People and Education Cabinet Board on 28th April 2016. Members requested that an update of the report be made available at a mid point prior to the 2016/17 report being completed.

The 2015/16 report noted that the fostering team and the wider children's services team had been successful in frioving forward the plan to saftely reduce the number of chidlren who are looked after by the Local Authority. It noted the challenges to the service of increasing the number of foster carers in particular the number of carers for teenagers.

At the time of reporting the Regulation 42 report highlighted the need for the service to ensure it had a sufficiency of placement choice and the report concluded with a number of recommendations for the service as follows.

Recommendation 1

To seek approval of the foster carers Recruitment Strategy

The Foster carers Recruitment Strategy was approved by Members in April 2016. The aim of the Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy was to identify the profile of children who are looked after and foster carers in Neath Port Talbot and to consider the key issues which needed to be addressed to have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced carers.

Recommendation 2

To seek approval of a revised foster carers Finance Policy

The revised 2016/17 foster carers finance policy was approved by Members in April 2016 and was implemented on 1st July 2016. The finance policy introduced a 'banding' system for carers which is aimed at supporting carers to progress in their fostering career. It introduced an increase in payments for carers looking after children over the age of 11 and a retainer of up to 6 weeks a year for carers of children over the age of 11.

Recommendation 3

To fully implement the When I Am Ready arrangements

The When I am Ready policy was approved by Members in March 2016 and was implemented from 6th April 2016 in accordance with the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014. The arrangements are applicable for young people who are looked after in foster carer who wish to remain living with their carers beyond the age of 18 until they are ready for independence. Since its

implementation 4 young have remained living with former foster carers under When I Am Ready arrangements. This is not fully reflective of the numbers of young people who remain with foster carers' post 18, but some of these will be under supported lodgings arrangements or as adult family placements. Children's Services and the Housing Benefit team have successfully worked together to ensure that where eligible, children's services pay the carer the full rate of the When I Am Ready allowances, and the Housing benefit element is repaid to children's services. This ensures a continuity of payments for carers. A social worker (Accommodation) post will shortly be advertised, and part of the role of the post holder will be to be a point of contact for When I Am Ready carers in addition to the young person's advisor.

Recommendation 4

To develop a Foster Carer marketing Strategy

This action is still under development. Marketing materials have been re-designed to reflect the new finance policy. Following on from the foster carers recruitment strategy the marketing strategy has been to focus on recruiting carers for the 11 plus age range. A focus has been on targeting professionals and people who currently work with teenagers to consider becoming carers. This approach has generated interest however the challenges of recruiting new foster carers remains a National and Local challenge. 9 foster carers have been approved since 1st April 2016. 8 of these approvals have been for children over the age of 10; 13 applicants are currently being assessed; 11 are due to attend training.

Recommendation 5

To establish the role of the consultant social worker to support the development and quality of the service.

The fostering service has benefited from 2 posts being converted to consultant social workers. . While all of the consultant social workers within children's services are focusing on the implementation of the Outcome measures across the teams they also hold individual interests. One consultant social worker sits with the assessment team within the service. She has been leading on the development of the support arrangements for Special Guardians, including the development of support plans and a support group. She is keen to develop assessments which are *family dynamic* focused and has been supporting teams across the service with this. The consultant social worker in the support and supervision team is the lead for Parent and Child Placement Carers (PACT).

Recommendation 6

To improve the performance management arrangements for fostering

The service continues to develop its performance management systems, and has reporting mechanisms to monitor key activities around recruitment and checks for carers. Members received information in relation to the recruitment of foster carers as part of the reporting arrangements.

Recommendation 7

To develop the arrangements to provide support for young people and their carers who have complex needs including clinical supervision and therapeutic services.

A member of staff who was previously seconded to Action for Children has returned to children's services and is undertaking a role as a family support worker. Her work is focussed on the prevention of placement breakdown and supporting children who are on the edge of coming into care. She has been working closely with carers who are looking after children with complex needs, providing support on behaviour management. Where it has been identified that children require therapeutic intervention, or carers would benefit from the advice from a psychologist to support them in caring for young people this has been commissioned either through private providers or via Hillside Secure Unit. Members have recently considered proposals to consult on and review the arrangements for some of the commissioned family support services. Part of the review will include the identified need for an in house play therapy and psychology service. The proposals are currently under development.

Conclusion

Good progress is being made on all of the recommendations within the Quality of Care report. The finalisation of a Marketing Strategy will further support the plans to recruit additional foster carers to the service.

The 2016/17 Quality of Care report will be presented to Members in April 2017. The report is usually presented in conjunction with the CSSIW Inspection report of the Fostering Service, however CSSIW have notified Local Authorities that due to the fact that there is a plan to introduce a revised framework for fostering inspections from April 2017, there will be no scheduled Inspection in 2016/17.