

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 4TH JULY, 2016

REFERENCE FROM HEALTHY LIVING AND SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE: 13TH JUNE, 2016

“83 THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE (DSS) –

The Operational Manager, Children and Young People Services, presented the report, the purpose of which was to update Members on implementation of the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy 2015/16 and to provide an overview of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) Annual Inspection 2015/16 along with the Review of Quality of Care Report for 2015/16 produced by the Council.

As a background summary, the report advised that where children and young people were unable to live within their own families, the Vale of Glamorgan Council aimed to provide high quality alternative family placements which would promote the child’s wellbeing and development. This was achieved primarily by using approved in-house foster carers.

The Vale of Glamorgan Fostering Service was provided by the Placements and Permanency Team. It was responsible for recruiting, assessing, preparing, training and supporting mainstream and relative (or “kinship”) foster carers. Mainstream foster carers were those who provided placements for any child subject to the age approval criteria, whereas relative foster carers had been approved specifically for a named child or children.

Under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated Regulations, the CSSIW was required to undertake an annual inspection of Local Authorities which provided a Fostering Service. The inspection for the Vale of Glamorgan took place during early March 2016 and the Inspection Report was attached at Appendix 1.

There was also a requirement to complete an Annual Review of the Quality of Care provided by the Fostering Service. The Review Report followed a format prescribed by the CSSIW. The Report for 2015/16 was attached as Appendix 2.

The Children and Young People Services Commissioning Strategy 2013-18 identified that, where children and young people could not be supported to remain with their birth families, they would be placed with foster carers within the Vale of Glamorgan. Where demand for placements exceeded that available within the Council service, placements were procured from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) at significant additional cost and sometimes at some distance from the area. A key priority for the Division was to recruit additional in-house carers in order to reduce reliance on IFA placements and to reduce the costs associated with providing services to Looked After Children.

A Fostering Service Recruitment Strategy had been updated in March 2015. The Strategy identified four key recruitment priorities:

- Placements for young people aged 11-16 years who presented challenging and often aggressive behaviour, who may be non-school attendees and who may have difficulties with alcohol and substance misuse
- Foster carers able to provide placements for sibling groups of two or more children
- Respite / short breaks placements to support children to remain living at home
- Foster carers who were willing to make a commitment to provide accommodation for young people for as long as they may require, which was in keeping with the new "When I am Ready" requirements which were likely to be introduced under the Social Services and Well-being Act.

To achieve these priorities, the Service aimed to:

- Increase enquiry rates to the service to 100 per year, using local and regional advertising campaigns
- Increase the enquiries to assessments conversion rate by 15%
- Increase the number of carers offering placements for sibling groups by a minimum of two per year
- Increase the number of carers offering teenage placements by a minimum of two per year
- Increase the number of carers offering respite / short break placements by a minimum of two per year
- Reduce the demand for IFA placements by 25%.

The Committee was updated with the outcomes following the Council's review of the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy 2015/16 and also a Review of the Quality of Care 2015/16. The report outlined that the Fostering Service had been working hard to complete the actions set out in the Recruitment Strategy and in the CSSIW's Inspection Report from 2014/15. It had been a challenging year for the Fostering Service with several new staff appointments and a new team manager appointed in September 2015. There had been a significant increase in the number of kinship assessments that the Service was being asked to complete during care proceedings within the Court arena. These were required within very tight timescales. 34 kinship assessments were allocated compared with 11 the previous year and 15 new kinship carers approved compared with 4 last year. This increased demand had affected the Service's ability to meet targets in regard to mainstream foster carers for the current year. Although the number of kinship assessments was difficult to predict, it was recognised that this form of care could provide positive outcomes where it enabled children to remain within their wider families. It was important for the Fostering Service, therefore, to be able to respond to both areas of demand for assessment. Maintaining the Service's ability to do this successfully remained a priority for the Children and Young People Services.

During the past year, there had been a national decline in the number of initial enquiries experienced by all Fostering Services. From 1st April 2015 to 31st March

2016, the Service received 55 registrations of interest. This was one less than the previous year. Initial visits to prospective applicants had also been fewer, reducing from 32 during 2014/15 to 22 for 2015/16. The drop in initial enquiries would be addressed by developing a new advertising campaign. For the first time, it would involve television advertising, then using this advert on social media and at local events.

The Recruitment Strategy was critical to increasing the number of foster carers in the Vale of Glamorgan. The Council was also engaged in helping develop a National Fostering Framework, one of the four major workstreams within the programme which had been established by the Strategic Steering Group set up by Welsh Government with the task of improving outcomes for children. The aims of the National Fostering Framework were to improve permanency planning for children and the quality of placement provision, making consistent use of best practice models for the recruitment and support of carers, and to support an increase in collaboration and co-operation by all stakeholders.

In terms of the CSSIW Annual Inspection of the Fostering Service, the report advised that at the time of the Inspection in March 2016, the Fostering Service was supporting 57 mainstream and 31 relative (kinship) foster carers, providing placements for 114 Looked After Children. At that time, 195 children and young people were Looked After by the Council.

The CSSIW Inspection concluded that the Fostering Service:

- Was effectively managed and a new manager was in place
- Was child centred with motivated staff
- Had good systems for consultation and quality assurance
- Provided good support and guidance to foster carers
- Was responsive to addressing issues raised by inspections and audits.

A number of improvements made since the 2015 Inspection were validated. These included the appointment of a manager, improved monitoring systems, better training and up to date reviews. The Inspectors identified two areas of compliance, together with a few areas for improvement. The first related to failing to notify the CSSIW of a change in the manager of the Fostering Service. This was immediately rectified and written notification given. The second area related to ensuring that the reasons for placements ending with foster carers were fully recorded and on the “record of placements” template. This was immediately rectified and the template updated. Improvement areas around foster carers’ supervision, agreements and delegated agreements had been noted and would be implemented.

The Chairman queried the plans around the National Fostering Framework and whether this would impact on the quality of service in the Vale. In reply, the Director of Social Services stated that, on behalf of Welsh Government and local government, he was leading on this project. He reassured Members that any proposals would be grounded strongly in the need for local services and local determination, as this was the most effective form when it came to service delivery. It was therefore important to maintain this, particularly when it came to having proper

accountability. However, he went onto comment that there were some areas that may best be tackled on a national or regional basis . For example, the one third of Foster Services provided by the Independent Sector appeared to cost the same as the remaining two thirds provided by the Public Sector.

In terms of the regional model, the Director explained that the aim was to look at those areas where things could be improved. This included marketing, a strategy on fees and support to foster carers, such as joint arrangements for training. In the first instance, any footprint for tackling issues on a regional basis is likely to involve using the Cardiff and Vale UHB footprint but this might include other regional partners. With regard to the timeframe for this, the Director advised that a 3 year programme was being put before Welsh Government and a Phase 1 update report would be provided to the Committee.

A Committee Member stated that he would like to praise the staff for their efforts. He also queried the reasons for de-registering foster carers. In reply, the Operational Manager for Children and Young People Services stated that for mainstream foster carers the reasons for de-registrations last year remained similar to previous years. So for 2015/16, the number of de-registrations included: two due to retirements, one due to a change in circumstances and one following a complaint or allegation. She also advised that the service had seen an increase in the age of its foster carers and that this was also being reported across Wales. As a follow on question, the Member queried whether exit interviews would be conducted. In reply, the Committee was advised that this would depend on the circumstances.

The Chairman commented that it appeared that recruitment of new foster carers had become more difficult. In answer to this, the Operational Manager for Children and Young People Services stated that 'yes' it was more difficult and that across Wales the number of initial enquires had decreased. This was why it was important to have a national marketing programme to attract prospective foster carers.

RECOMMENDED -

- (1) T H A T the Scrutiny Committee notes the progress made to date in implementing the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.
- (2) T H A T the Scrutiny Committee notes the content of the quality of care report and the positive findings of the CSSIW Annual Inspection.
- (3) T H A T the Scrutiny Committee's thanks and congratulations be passed on to staff.
- (4) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet to highlight the positive work being undertaken.

Reasons for recommendations

(1&2) To enable the Scrutiny Committee to exercise effective oversight of this key activity within the Children and Young Peoples Services and to ensure that the

Council's Statutory functions in relation to providing a regulated fostering service are fully met.

(3) In order to pass on the Committee's thanks and appreciation.

(4) In order to update Cabinet on the findings following the CSSIW Annual Inspection."

Attached as Appendix - [Report to Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee - 13th June, 2016](#)