

Public Document Pack

Gareth Owens LL.B Barrister/Bargyfreithiwr
Chief Officer (Governance)
Prif Swyddog (Llywodraethu)



To: Cllr Carol Ellis (Chair)

CS/NG

Councillors: Adele Davies-Cooke,
Andy Dunbobbin, Veronica Gay, David Healey,
Cindy Hinds, Hilary Isherwood, Brian Lloyd,
Mike Lowe, Hilary McGuill, Dave Mackie,
Mike Reece, Ian Smith, Carolyn Thomas and
David Wisinger

17 July 2015

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Dear Sir / Madam

A meeting of the **SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in the **DELYN COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, MOLD CH7 6NA** on **THURSDAY, 23RD JULY, 2015** at **10.00 AM** to consider the following items.

Yours faithfully

Democracy & Governance Manager

A G E N D A

- 1 **APOLOGIES**
- 2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)**
- 3 **MINUTES** (Pages 3 - 20)
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the Joint meeting of Education & Youth Overview & Scrutiny and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4th June 2015 and the meeting of this Committee held on 18th June 2015.

4 **CSSIW SAFEGUARDING AND CARE PLANNING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROGRESS REPORT TO INCLUDE UPDATE ON THE DEMANDS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES** (Pages 21 - 26)

Report of Chief Officer (Social Services) enclosed.

5 **FOSTERING SERVICES INSPECTION REPORT** (Pages 27 - 46)

Report of Chief Officer (Social Services) enclosed.

6 **ROTA VISITS**

To receive a verbal report from Members of the Committee.

**JOINT EDUCATION & YOUTH AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 JUNE 2015**

Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Education & Youth and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 4 June 2015

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Roberts (Chairman)

Councillors: Marion Bateman, Paul Cunningham, Peter Curtis, Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, Carol Ellis, David Healey, Cindy Hinds, Mike Lowe, Dave Mackie, Hilary McGuill, Vicky Perfect, Mike Reece, Ian Smith, and Carolyn Thomas

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Janine Beggan, David Hytch, Rita Price and John Thelwell

APOLOGIES: Councillors Brian Lloyd and David Wisinger. Rebecca Stark. Cabinet Member for Education

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillors Amanda Bragg (for Nancy Matthews) and Jim Falshaw (for Nigel Stele-Mortimer)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Social Services, Chief Officer (Education and Youth), Chief Officer (Social Services), Head of Inclusion Services, Senior Manager Children's Lead, Early Years and Family Support Manager, Advisor for Social Inclusion and Well Being, and Ann Noden, Manager Sensory Services.

ATTENDANCE:

Education and Youth and Community & Enterprise Facilitator and Committee Officer

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MEETING

The Education & Youth Facilitator sought nominations for a Chair for the meeting.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Ian Roberts be appointed as Chairman for the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Marion Bateman declared a personal interest in the following item due to being a member of the Pupil Referral Unit Committee

Agenda Item 4a – Educational Attainment for Looked After Children

Councillor David Healey declared a personal interest in the following item as he was trustee of Home-Start Flintshire:-

Agenda Item 4 – Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding and Child Protection

Councillor Ian Roberts declared a personal interest in the following item due to his position as acting Head of a school which has a hearing impaired unit:-

Agenda Item 6 – Hearing Impairment for Adults and Children

3. CORPORATE PARENTING, SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION

The Chief Officer (Social Services) introduced a report to provide an overview of activity and performance in relation to both corporate parenting and safeguarding/child protection. He introduced Vicky Allen, Senior Manager Children's Lead, and invited her to provide detail.

The Senior Manager Children's Lead, provided background information and referred to the key considerations which were detailed in the report around child protection, safeguarding, and corporate parenting.

The Chairman thanked the Senior Manager Children's Lead for her overview and invited members to raise questions.

Councillor Hilary McGuill raised a concern around safeguarding and child protection in relation to home schooled children. She referred to a Serious Case Review which was held in 2011 and asked what measures had been put in place to address the shortfalls that were identified as a result of the Review. In his response the Chief Officer (Education and Youth) explained that following the Review strenuous efforts had been made to achieve a change in the legislative position if families refused to have a home visit, however, to date there had been no change in the legislation. Responding to the further questions and concerns raised by Councillor McGuill the Chief Officer advised that the Authority did not have a right of access to a child who was being home schooled. During discussion Officers referred to the processes for raising concerns around the well being, safeguarding and protection of young people and work ongoing. It was suggested that the Committee may wish to make further representations to the Welsh Government to secure a change in the legislation. Councillor McGuill proposed that a letter be sent on behalf of the Joint Education & Youth and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee to set out the concerns raised by members and request a change in the current legislation. The proposal was seconded and when put to the vote was unanimously carried.

Councillor Dave Mackie referred to Members key role and responsibilities as Corporate Parents and emphasised the need for contact

with Looked After Children (LAC). The Chief Officer (Social Services) responded to the concerns expressed by Councillor Mackie and acknowledged the point made in relation to the Children's Services Forum and Annual Pride of Flintshire event. Councillor Carol Ellis proposed that the details of Members of the Children's Services Forum be included in future information packs provided to LAC so that they could contact Members directly if they had any concerns they wished to raise. She also asked that the Education and Youth and Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committees be notified when that action had been taken. Councillor Andy Dunbobbin commented that some Members were also School Governors and suggested that this contact information also be included in the pack provided to LAC. The proposal was seconded and when put to the vote was unanimously carried.

Councillor Hilary McGuill suggested that Members be invited to the 'speak out' events. The Senior Manager Children's Lead said that she would take this back to Gwenan Roberts as a suggestion.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the developments underway in relation to the discharge of the Local Authority's safeguarding duties be supported;
- (b) That the responsibilities of Members as Corporate Parents be acknowledged, and that Members continue to promote positive outcomes for children and young people;
- (c) That the Committee make representations to the Welsh Government seeking their support in changing the legislation with regard to 'no right of access on the doorstep' for children who are home schooled; and
- (d) That contact details of Members of the Children's Services Forum be included in future information packs given to Looked After Children.

4. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Head of Inclusion Services introduced a report to update on the attainment of Looked After Children (LAC) in Flintshire for the academic year 2013-14. She provided background information and gave a presentation on Looked After Children. The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- Summary of activity 2014/15
- Outcomes for 2013/14
- Out of County Placements
- Out of County Outcomes 2013/14
- Attendance and Exclusions
- National Strategy
- Operational
- Regional Strategy
- Developing a whole school approach

- Training
- Developing a school-to-school approach
- Individualised approach where necessary
- Monitoring of the regional plan

The Chairman thanked the Head of Inclusion Service for her detailed presentation and invited members to raise questions.

Councillor Hilary McGuill commented on the regional review of the use of the ONE database (Education) and its links to PARIS (Social Services) and asked for an update on progress. The Head of Inclusion Service responded to the concerns raised and reported on system development. She explained that there was not universal use across the region as yet but work was in progress.

Mr David Hytch queried whether young people were achieving any less than their potential and asked if there was some form of prediction against which children's potential could be measured. In her response the Head of Inclusion Services commented on the need for the Service to be confident that young people were achieving in line with its high expectation of them. She referred to the TRAC project and reported that this was a regional initiative across North Wales, where European Social Funding will be used to identify 11-24 year olds at risk of disengagement and provide resources to support young people to maintain their placements and achieve.

Councillor Cindy Hinds referred to the mental health difficulties experienced by some young people. The Head of Inclusion Service said the importance of supporting young people as early as possible was recognised and referred to the need for early intervention to support children in the Foundation Phase and Primary school.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin referred to the underlying social, emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by some young people which affected outcomes and commented there was insufficient data in the report to support this. The Head of Inclusion Service said that the difficulties were recognised and the Service was working with schools to support young people. She referred to the training provided around relationships society and family.

In response to the comments and questions raised by members the Head of Inclusion Service explained there were 150 LAC in Flintshire and only a small number were not in mainstream education. She advised that the education of LAC was a high priority and many initiatives had been instigated to improve outcomes. She explained that a group of professionals comprising representation from Children and Mental Health Support Service (CAMHS), Behaviour Support Service, schools, Children's Services, inclusion and the LAC Co-ordinator, oversaw the education of LAC. She also commented on the value of proposing that a Governor on each school Governing Body be given responsibility for LAC.

Councillor Carol Ellis sought clarification around the data provided in relation to attendance and exclusion statistics for LAC and asked how many children the 55 incidents of fixed term exclusions related to. The Head of Inclusion Service agreed to provide further details. During discussion the issue of exclusions and use of fixed term exclusions was raised by members and concerns expressed around the effect on carers of the young person. Members asked what arrangements were in place to ensure support for carers of the young person excluded. Officers referred to the range of strategies in place and commented on the preventative work and consideration of providing alternative accommodation to enable the young person to remain within a supervised and monitored environment whilst continuing to undertake school work. The Head of Inclusion Service emphasised that the Service advocated a no exclusion policy and that the priority was to work with the young person to prevent escalation of a problem.

The Chair commented that when a LAC was excluded there was a corporate responsibility for the time the child was excluded. He asked if there was any evidence that placements could breakdown due to the young person being excluded. The Chief Officer (Social Services) referred to the family placement scheme which provided support in such situations and the range of interventions to prevent placement breakdown. He added that the Authority currently had the highest number of Foster Care placements and recognised the importance of working jointly with schools to support carers.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin expressed the view that it was important that young people understood the reason for the exclusion and the consequences.

Councillor David Healey commented on the internal strategies which were used by schools to address the issue.

Councillor Carol Ellis asked how many breakdowns in care placements had occurred as a result of exclusions. She also asked that if a continued exclusion was used was the young person referred to CAMHS as a matter of urgency. The Chief Officer (Education and Youth) agreed to provide a briefing paper to Members from the Service Manager concerning any instances of placement breakdown which occurred as a result of repeat exclusions and submit a follow-up report on the matter to the Education & Youth and Social & Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

In response to Councillor Hilary McGuill's concerns on the number of exclusions over the year for LAC, the majority of which were from the Pupil Referral Unit, it was agreed that Officers would provide further detail to members on how many young people the number of instances related to.

Councillor Carol Ellis expressed concerns around use of the A2A card in schools and cited the example of a young carer who had experienced difficulty when she had presented the card in a school as the school concerned did not understand its purpose. The Head of Inclusion Service agreed to take the matter forward and raise awareness at the appropriate

school-related forums. The Chief Officer said he would speak to Councillor Ellis about the matter following the meeting.

Councillor Peter Curtis raised concerns around the number of abbreviations used throughout the report. The Chief Officer acknowledged the point and said his comments would be taken on board.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the work of the Looked After Children steering group and its continued role in having a positive impact upon the achievements of Looked After Children be supported;
- (b) That the remodelling of the Pupil Referral Unit be given added impetus to Looked After Children to achieve to the best of their ability;
- (c) That Looked After Children be given named mentors in every school to ensure that they are properly advised and guided on their education pathway, in line with the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework;
- (d) That every Looked After Children as well as having their Personal Education Plan, have a personal statement written about themselves be introduced throughout Flintshire schools;
- (e) That those children who have additional learning needs continue to access specialist support to help them reach their potential;
- (f) That the Social Services and Education & Youth Services continue to work collaboratively to further enhance and embed consistent approaches with regard to Looked After Children;
- (g) That Flintshire accesses funds that will be controlled by GwE to ensure positive and worthwhile training is given to all school staff;
- (h) That work to develop a database on a regional basis to reflect the needs and support provision required for all Looked After Children continues;
- (i) That the positive collaboration across Local Authorities continue to be encouraged so that cross border working and information sharing improves; and
- (j) That a briefing note be circulated to Members of both Committees, outlining whether there had been any breakdowns in care placements as a result of school exclusions, with a fuller report to be presented to both Committees in due course, if there was any indication that there had.

5. CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLES PARTNERSHIP AND FLYING START PROGRAMME

The Chief Officer (Social Services) introduced a report to provide an update on the work to support children and families provided by the Early Years and Family Support Service in Flintshire. He introduced Gail Bennett, Early Years and Family Support Manager, and invited her to give an overview.

The Early Years and Family Support Manager provided background information and advised that evidence indicated that intensive intervention in the early years could make a real difference to outcomes for children and their families in the longer term. She reported on the Flintshire Parenting Strategy, Family Information Service, the Quest Project, Y Teulu Cyfan (The Whole Family), Flintshire Community Parents, and Flying Start.

Councillor Dave Mackie expressed the view that the achievement of children at pre-school, Foundation Phase and Primary school could be improved through the early intervention work making a difference to children's life chances. He said that the position should be looked at to see if anything could be done to induce an improvement from the outset in terms of early years education. The Early Years and Family Support Manager responded to the concerns raised and referred to work in progress and future developments.

During discussion officers responded to the comments and questions raised concerning the Quest project and Families First criteria and funding, and funding for Flying Start.

Councillor David Healey expressed concerns around the areas of deprivation which existed in rural communities which were missing out on benefit provision.

RESOLVED:

That the ongoing developments of the Early Years and Family Support Service be endorsed.

6. HEARING IMPAIRMENT FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN

The Chief Officer (Social Services) introduced a report to provide information on the current provision of support to children and adults with a hearing impairment in Flintshire. He gave background information and referred to the services provided by the North Wales Deaf Association (NWDA) and the Deafness Support Network.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked how often and when was children's hearing tested in school. The Manager, Sensory Services, advised that children were tested at the age of 7 and referred to the alert mechanisms and systems in place to support children who demonstrated hearing difficulties.

Councillor Cindy Hinds expressed concern that Flintshire residents had to travel to a specialist centre in Chester if they wished to take the opportunity to try a range of hearing equipment. The Chief Officer (Social Services) explained that the Centre offered additional equipment which was not available at the North East Wales Community Equipment Store but would make further enquiries on this matter. Councillor Hinds raised further concerns regarding not being able to visit different hospitals when issues arose with hearing aids. The Chief Officer (Social Services) suggested that this be raised with BCUHB when they next attended a Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting.

RESOLVED

That the development of the service be endorsed.

7. ATTENDANCE BY MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public in attendance

(The meeting started at 2.00pm and ended at 4.17pm)

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Chairman

SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
18 JUNE 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Thursday, 18 June 2015

PRESENT: **Councillor Carol Ellis (Chair)**

Councillors: Adele Davies-Cooke, Andy Dunbobbin, Veronica Gay, David Healey, Brian Lloyd, Mike Lowe, Hilary McGuill, Dave Mackie, Mike Reece and Ian Smith

APOLOGIES: Cabinet Member for Social Services, Chief Officer (Social Services)

Councillors: Hilary Isherwood, Carolyn Thomas and David Wisinger

CONTRIBUTORS: Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance, Senior Manager Safeguarding: Lead Children, Disability Service Manager and Housing Regeneration & Strategy Manager

Complaints Officer (for minute number 14)

IN ATTENDANCE: Environment & Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Committee Officer

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Councillor Hilary McGuill declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 5 'Year End Chief Officer Performance Report' as her great nephew had been the recipient of a Disabled Facilities Grant.

The following Members declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 4 'Annual Report on the Social Services Representations and Complaints Procedure 2014-15':

Councillor Ian Smith - due to his stepson living in an assisted living placement (out of county) funded by the Council.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin - as a kinship carer.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2015 had been circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. **ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SOCIAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE 2014-15**

The Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance introduced the annual report on compliments, representations and complaints received by Adult and Children Social Services for the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. The information included a breakdown of complaints between service areas, and details of how these were resolved, timescales and outcomes. Whilst there was a statutory duty on councils to adopt their own complaints procedure, the approach taken by Flintshire also included a more independent and personal element by listening to the views of service users and to learn from them.

Social Services for Adults

The Complaints Officer gave an overview of statistics for Adult Social Services for which 56 complaints had been received out of a total of 4,182 service users supported during the period. As detailed in the report, the Disability Service Manager explained that the increase in complaints for the Learning Disability Service was due to the introduction of a toolkit assessment which calculated the number of respite nights for families. Some of the 80 individuals assessed had seen a reduction in their allocation, however it was noted that a series of independent review panels chaired by an external independent person had upheld every decision made by the Council through this assessment. It was reported that 95% of the complaints had been resolved within the required timescale for Stage 1 of the process; where this was not met, the complainant had been kept informed of progress.

On the Learning Disability Service, Councillor Hilary McGuill asked about the frequency of reviewing individuals' needs/situations. The Disability Service Manager explained that the statutory requirement was for a formal review to be undertaken annually, and that this would also be instigated for any reported changes in circumstances. She confirmed that the complaints for that service area were mainly due to the recent changes implemented on respite provision and would therefore expect to see a reduction next year.

The Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance explained that the review formed part of the efficiency programme and that individuals were assessed against the revised framework.

In response to a question from Councillor Mike Lowe, the Disability Service Manager said that there had been no further challenge from the complainants to the outcomes of the assessment, following the independent panel reviews. However, she said that each case was considered individually and gave an example where respite allocation had been adjusted to support the situation of an individual.

The Complaints Officer highlighted the increase in the number of compliments received since 2013-14, but felt that the figure could be higher still due to reluctance by some officers to share this information. Councillor Dave Mackie stressed the importance of capturing as much of this data as possible and encouraged officers to pursue this. The Complaints Officer felt that the

majority of compliments were being recorded and that managers and staff were regularly reminded of the need to supply this data.

Councillor Andy Dunbobbin welcomed the increase in compliments relating to Mental Health and Substance Misuse and felt that there was now a higher level of awareness of mental health issues. Whilst recognising the challenges in recruiting staff for private homecare, he stressed the need for advertisements to include appropriate criteria and training to demonstrate capability. The Senior Manager said that the minimum job requirements were set by regulators and that the difficulties in attracting and retaining good quality permanent care staff was to be the focus of discussion by a Task Group. Responding to a query on the drop in the total number of service users since 2012-13, he said it was reasonable to expect some reduction as a result of some moves to reablement services, however the difference could be due to a change in accumulating figures and would clarify this in a separate response to the Committee. The Chair reinforced the need for clarity on reporting statistics to enable meaningful scrutinising.

Councillor McGuill was pleased to note the detail in the report on compliments. She raised concerns about the two complaints relating to dignity involving private registered providers and asked if records were kept showing whether those staff had undertaken the dignity training that was available. The Complaints Officer agreed to check this with the Contract Monitoring Team.

Councillor McGuill also raised concerns about the complaint relating to a lack of clarity and detail on care arrangements (Older People - Intake & Reablement). The Complaints Officer confirmed that officers had discussed the complaint with the family member and the care staff to ensure that this was resolved and understood by all. Whilst he could not give any guarantee that this would not be an issue in all cases, he gave assurance that these actions would help to reduce similar complaints in the future.

Following a query on actions taken to address the two proven allegations about care at privately registered homes, it was explained that these were now subject to the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) process which involved planning how to manage the risk and putting in place appropriate safeguards. The Complaints Officer agreed to provide a response to the Committee on what actions were being taken.

Reference was made to direct payments and changes in regulations in respect of pension and sickness benefits. The Disability Service Manager said that the Chief Officer (Social Services) had agreed that a percentage of the unused allocation of direct payments could be collected by the Council to support those individuals who were subject to financial hardship as a result of the legislative changes.

Following a question from Councillor Ian Smith, the Complaints Officer provided explanation on the complaint relating to the provision of meals from a privately registered domiciliary provider.

The Senior Manager explained that any concerns about service provision such as meals were subject to robust contract monitoring procedures to reassure

the Council and to prevent the escalation of complaints. He also referred to the approach taken by the Council to step beyond normal practice and discuss concerns with complainants to understand what was needed to improve services and to avoid the need for referrals to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Councillor Dunbobbin suggested that representatives of external care providers could be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to raise awareness of the level of scrutiny on performance. The Senior Manager explained that officers met regularly with the range of external providers working with the Council, and suggested that some Members could be involved with this. The Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator agreed, pointing out that a presentation had previously been given by a senior officer from a domiciliary care organisation. The Senior Manager suggested that the findings of Task Groups could be reported to the Committee, providing an opportunity for Members to scrutinise and challenge.

The Chair, along with Councillors Dunbobbin and McGuill, all expressed an interest in working with the Task Groups.

A query was raised by Councillor Veronica Gay about the monitoring of out of county care home services for Flintshire residents. The Senior Manager explained that arrangements were in place for an annual review of the individual's circumstances and progress involving a visit and contract monitoring checks. In addition, the care homes were inspected by the relevant regulator. For domiciliary care, a framework was in place to ensure that the provider was approved and was subject to contract monitoring arrangements to ensure that contractual obligations were being met.

The Senior Manager agreed to ascertain the number of Flintshire residents in out of county care homes and provide a response. The Chair asked that the response include the number of elderly mentally infirm.

The Disability Service Manager advised that out of county figures for individuals with learning disabilities were in the region of 40 and those with physical disabilities were less than ten.

Social Services for Children

The Complaints Officer reported a reduction in the number of complaints received since the previous year and an increase in the number of recorded compliments. He referred to positive links with the advocacy service which was promoted at various meetings and events. In providing background on the key issues, he highlighted the significant drop in complaints for Childcare Fieldwork and drew attention to work with managers to improve timescales for resolving complaints within the required timescale.

Councillor McGuill made reference to complaints on nine separate issues made by one foster care couple and asked whether sufficient training was available to avoid potential breakdowns in the fostering system. The Complaints Officer said that as part of lessons learned from the complaints, consideration was being given to refresher training for foster carers in addition to that provided at the approval stage, which would strengthen the process.

Councillor Dunbobbin paid tribute to the valuable assistance given by his social worker and by the child's social worker to help him in his capacity as a kinship carer. Whilst he had found access to training opportunities sometimes difficult due to a variety of reasons, he felt that options for different times would help attendance.

It was explained by the Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance that foster carers had an annual review which identified any training requirements and helped to inform the training programme. He said that the provision of online training was being explored and that he would seek views on training at a forthcoming meeting with a foster carer group.

Councillor Dave Mackie said it was encouraging to see a reduction in the number of complaints given the significant increase in the number of referrals. Councillor Dunbobbin reflected on the Care & Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) report which had acknowledged the Council's positive efforts on corporate parenting.

The Senior Manager Safeguarding: Lead Children commented on initial verbal feedback from the recent CSSIW inspection which had commended staff within the service and the quality of relationships with children and families.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the recommendations/suggestions made by the Committee be taken forward; and
- (b) That officers be encouraged to share details on compliments received for their service areas.

15. YEAR END CHIEF OFFICER PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance presented the 2014/15 year end service performance report produced by the Chief Officer (Social Services) for his portfolio. He gave a short presentation on performance, outlining work which had been undertaken to improve performance and areas where improvement was needed, as outlined within the report.

During explanation on the two operational risks identified in the wider risk register on the resilience of the independent sector, reference was made to the lack of available beds in the county, the increasing demand to support individuals with more complex needs and work to progress more extra care facilities as an alternative to residential care. As mentioned in the previous item, the challenges around recruiting quality nursing staff had resulted in heavy reliance on bank (agency) nurses and would be the subject of discussions with the health sector. Information was also provided on measures to improve sickness absence figures.

The Housing Regeneration & Strategy Manager explained that timescales for Disabled Facilities Grants had been greatly affected by staff recruitment and

retention issues in Housing over the past 12 months. However, it was hoped that this would be resolved through the restructuring of teams.

On the review of care plans during the year, the Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance pointed out that the Council's achievement of 98% in the previous year had been the best performance across Wales, and was pleased to note that this level had been sustained for 2014/15.

The Senior Manager Safeguarding: Lead Children reported that all year end performance indicators for Children's Services had improved, apart from two relating to the completion of initial assessments where there was evidence of the child being seen/being seen alone by a social worker and re-referrals rates. She explained that the re-referrals rates were not straightforward as systems could capture multiple referrals relating to a single event and incorrectly reflect these as re-referrals, eg referrals from multiple agencies attending a single event would appear as re-referrals. Work has already commenced to review re-referrals and to revisit recording and reporting processes to provide a true reflection of re-referral rates. As an update, she reported that of the 35 indicators for last year, 20 had shown improvement, seven remained the same and eight decreased.

On corporate reporting (Section 3), Councillor McGuill pointed out the need for percentage bands on the graphs between Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 to be consistent to enable proper comparison. The Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance said that this would be relayed to corporate colleagues who were responsible for producing the information.

Councillor Veronica Gay requested that the embedded document in Section 3 of the report be made available, if possible, and that any such documents be made accessible in future reports.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the comments/observations of the Committee are fed back to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of performance, in particular the concerns around the 'red' risk areas which also relate to Health; and
- (c) That the comments on graph formatting and embedded documents be passed to the Performance team for future reference.

16. YEAR END IMPROVEMENT PLAN MONITORING REPORTS

The Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance introduced the report for the Committee to note and consider elements of the 2014/15 Year End Improvement Plan Monitoring Report relevant to the Committee.

A short presentation was given on performance within each of the sub-priority areas, highlighting work which had been undertaken to improve performance and areas where improvement was needed, as outlined within each report.

Independent Living

On the average days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), the Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance acknowledged that this was an area of particular concern for children/young people. He said that officers were looking at measures to reduce the timescales, explaining that the outturn for 2014/15 was due to the two cases involving some complex issues.

Councillor Hilary McGuill asked what was being done to help individuals in those cases, pointing out that the delays represented a long time in the lives of those children. She went on to stress the importance of 'future proofing' to plan for the years ahead where the child's needs could become more complex.

The Disability Service Manager pointed out that the indicator was measured from the start of the process through to completion sign-off and that did not reflect a range of interim measures implemented to help families awaiting the installation of equipment. In terms of forward planning, Occupational Therapists were responsible for co-ordinating a range of professional assistance which could be drawn upon, however it was not possible to accurately predict future needs in every case.

Councillor McGuill questioned the effectiveness of this approach and had previously raised with officers her concerns about the lack of forward planning for adaptations on a particular case. The Housing Regeneration & Strategy Manager was aware of the case and referred to it being highly complex in terms of the adaptations required. He went on to give assurance of forward planning as much as possible and said that the case highlighted would be reviewed again.

In response to further concerns raised by Councillor McGuill on improving timescales for DFG work for children/young people, the Disability Service Manager suggested that it may be helpful to share anonymised historic assessment data with the Committee to demonstrate the different elements of the process.

When asked how many DFGs had been completed for children/young people beyond 2014/15, the Housing Regeneration & Strategy Manager agreed to find out and respond to the Committee.

On DFGs, Councillor Dave Mackie suggested that it may be useful for future outturns to be accompanied by specific commentary including any feedback from the parent/carer, to satisfy Members of the support given and that perhaps a breakdown of the various elements of the process could help to identify where the problem was. He also pointed out inconsistencies in the 2013/14 baseline data and 2016/17 aspirational target when compared with the previous year's report.

In response to the concerns around DFGs, the Senior Manager: Commissioning and Performance suggested that he liaise with Internal Audit and request an assessment of the process to assure the Committee.

The Housing Regeneration & Strategy Manager reiterated that the outturns represented average figures, involving a range of actions, with complex issues including some matters outside the control of the Council. He remained confident that improvements could be made through the filling of posts in Housing.

Councillor Mike Lowe referred to the need for customers to be satisfied with the DFG work, irrespective of any delays which may be necessary.

In response to a query from Councillor Mackie, the Senior Manager Safeguarding: Lead Children provided explanation on referrals to the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) and the outturn which related to the 'distance travelled' by families from the start of intervention progressing along the travel spectrum. She confirmed that the missing data was available and should have been included. Councillor Mackie also highlighted missing data on the performance indicators relating to homelessness.

For Children's Services, Councillor Mackie highlighted the need for adequate forward planning to enable child in need plans to be reviewed within the required timescale. Whilst the Senior Manager felt there was room for improvement, she pointed out that the outturn had improved significantly since the previous year and was above the Welsh average. On the percentage of referrals that were re-referrals, she stated that a number of these could have been generated by one incident and classed as repeat referrals. She went on to provide details of the revised structure for Children's Services, due for consultation, which was aimed at creating more capacity for early intervention preventative work and should help to improve performance figures for next year.

Integrated Community Social and Health Services

Councillor Mackie spoke of concerns shared by the community health council on funding for the predicted demand of enhanced care services. The Chair said that Health Board representatives had attended a previous meeting where concerns had been raised about the lack of progression on enhanced care and locality working, and that this issue should be passed to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted;
- (b) That the areas highlighted as 'red' risks be referred to the Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny who are responsible for the overview and monitoring of performance; and
- (c) That the concerns around timescales for Disabled Facilities Grants for children/young people be referred to the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

17. ROTA VISITS

No rota visits had been undertaken since last reported.

RESOLVED:

That the information be noted.

18. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Facilitator introduced a report to enable the Committee to consider the Forward Work Programme. Following agreement from the Committee, she agreed to schedule a date in July 2015 for a planning session to populate the Forward Work Programme.

In response to a comment by Councillor Ian Smith on meeting times, the Chair pointed out that meetings were split between mornings and afternoons to accommodate the preferences of various Members.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme planning session be arranged for July 2015.

19. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.55 am)

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Chair

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2015**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)**

SUBJECT: **CSSIW SAFEGUARDING AND CARE PLANNING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROGRESS REPORT TO INCLUDE UPDATE ON THE DEMANDS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To provide Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a progress update on the implementation of the key findings from the CSSIW Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children.

1.02 The report will also provide an update on the demands on Children's Services and how these are being managed.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 In 2014 the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) undertook a national thematic inspection that focussed on Safeguarding and Care Planning of looked after children and care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours. All twenty two local authorities were inspected with the findings of each of these inspections captured in a national overview report.

2.02 The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively :

- Supports and protects looked after children and care leavers;
- Identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviours of looked after children and care leavers;
- Promotes rights based practice and the voice of the child;
- Promotes improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers;
- Promotes compliance with policy and guidance

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The final conclusions of the inspection were set out in the report in the form of a number of questions asked about practice and

processes within the local authority. This report will therefore provide an overview of the key developments the service has taken in response to those key questions.

3.02 Did the authority effectively discharge its corporate parenting roles and responsibilities promoting the stability, welfare and safety of looked after children and care leavers?

3.02.1 There are a number of key activities within Flintshire that enable an effective and appropriate discharge of corporate parenting responsibilities which includes:

- Bi-monthly Children's Services Forum – at the recent forum (May) four young people attended and actively contributed to the discussions.
- Annual Climbie visits to visit Children's Social Services teams – the most recent visit was undertaken 11th May by Councillors Bernie Attridge, Chris Bithell and Christine Jones and supported by Chief Officers Ian Budd and Neil Ayling;
- Elected member rota visits – the most recent visits have been undertaken to Bryntirion school;
- Annual Pride of Flintshire event – very successful event that took place on 4th July 2015.
- Regular Scrutiny reports;
- Social Work activity delivered through all Social Work teams (CYAST in particular);
- The roles and responsibilities attributed to the dedicated Participation Officer

3.02.2 As has previously been reported to Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee the performance in relation to promoting outcomes for looked after children (LAC) and care leavers has been positive throughout 2014/15 with a notable improvement in respect of educational outcomes (such as attainment and attendance). The timeliness of health assessments for looked after children did experience a small drop in performance in 2014/15 however the appointment of a dedicated LAC nurse working closely with health is seeing improvements in performance in year. In addition a meeting has been set up with the strategic lead in Health lead to identify opportunities to improve process and practice.

3.02.3 Placement instability did increase slightly in 2014/15 and there are a number of developments in place to actively target this area which includes:

- In- house placement range – Peter/ Jenny to confirm what we have done
- The timeliness of disruption meetings has improved in order to

prevent the potential for placement breakdown;

- Effective and robust processes in respect of the Public Law Outline and associated care proceedings processes alongside a stronger focus on Special Guardianship (through the support of a designated post holder) is starting to lead to a reduction in LAC placements
- A review of the terms of reference for the Out of County Panel has taken place and work is underway with Health across North Wales to improve the process for identifying and agreeing Continuing Care packages
- Planning for the service restructure has commenced and key features that should directly impact on LAC population and placements include a stronger integration of early intervention services and more targeted family support services that will include support to foster carers

3.02.4 The matter of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was also highlighted in the CSSIW report and as a local authority there is involvement in a range of initiatives that are focussed on safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation on both a local and regional platform.

3.02.5 At a local level there is: a newly formed CSE multi-agency panel that works to ensure multi-agency assessment and support for children/young people who are identified as being at risk of CSE; we have Victim Contact Team arrangements in conjunction with the Police to provide direct engagement and support to young people. At a regional level the North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board has identified CSE as a key priority and as such has working groups focussed on CSE, the initial findings of which will be fed into a CSE themed annual conference (for the Regional Safeguarding Board) in the autumn.

3.03 **Were care and pathway plans informed by relevant assessments, including explicit risk assessments, which supported a comprehensive response to the needs and experiences of children and young people?**

3.03.1 The quality of assessments and care plans are subject to case file auditing arrangements and monitored through supervision. The case file auditing tools have recently been revised to ensure a stronger focus on practice quality, outcomes, ensuring the voice of the child is heard, effective analysis and decision making. In 2014/15 there was 100% performance in respect of care leavers being allocated a named personal advisor and having appropriate and timely pathway plans in place.

3.03.2 The appointment of a designated CAMHS post for looked after

children is starting to reap benefits with good working relationships established between the service and CAMHS which is now enabling an improvement in the timeliness of CAMHS provision to looked after children.

3.04 Were operational systems and procedures in place that ensured responsive coordinated action was taken to mitigate risk and achieve safe continuity of care?

3.04.1 Within Children's Services there has been a noticeable improvement in staff attendance with a 50% reduction in staff sickness levels in 2014/15. This alongside the position that all looked after children have allocated workers is helping to reduce the potential for children experiencing changes in Social Workers. However, it is recognised that there is further work to be undertaken to minimise the number of changes of Social Workers children and young people which will be addressed through the forthcoming service restructure.

3.04.2 There are ongoing audits in relation to staff supervision although changes have been made to the framework to ensure there is a stronger focus on quality and effectiveness. In April a survey was undertaken with all staff within the fieldwork service to better understand their experience of supervision and the over 97% reported that they feel supervision is timely, effective and of good quality and a positive approach to supporting their personal and professional development.

3.04.3 Work is also underway with the business systems team to streamline and improve assessment and care planning documentation and there is an additional piece of work being undertaken with children and young people to revise and improvement the consultation documentation that they complete themselves.

3.05 Did Independent Reviews and quality assurance arrangements promote safe care and best outcomes for young people?/ Did care and pathway planning effectively capture and promote the rights and voice of the child?

3.05.1 The grading for the Independent Reviewing Officers has now been resolved and has now brought equity to the pay and conditions of similar functions across the region.

3.05.2 The Quality Assurance Framework is being developed with a stronger focus on the voice of the child being central to decision making and service delivery alongside a commitment to identifying, articulating and monitoring the outcomes achieved for (and with) children and young people. Running concurrently with this is practice that is already established that enable the Independent Reviewing Officers to escalate concerns through senior managers, along with

highlighting good practice

3.05.3

It is recognised that the Placement strategy does need to be reviewed and this will be done as part of a wider piece of work to develop a new LAC strategy that will be focussed on: reducing the potential for children to become looked after (through early intervention approaches); exploring alternative support arrangements for children and young people that do not require them to come into the formal care system; supporting placements effectively when children do come into the care system; responding to the new changes to duties as set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014).

3.06

Demands on Social Services

3.06.1

The responses described above in relation to looked after children have to be considered within the context of the broader activity taking place within Children's Services as coming into the care system is the final stage that a child/ young person may experience on their journey within social care.

3.06.2

The referral and contact activity at the front door of the service has increased significantly over the past three years with a total of 709 referrals received in 2012-13 up to a total of 1825 in 2014/15. Whilst these numbers do not necessarily equate to a direct service response by the service the activity levels do indicate the increasing levels of vulnerability within the area. As would be expected with such a significant increase in referrals there has been a notable increase in re-referral rates from 13% in 2013/14 to 26% in 2014/15. However, re-referrals rates are not straightforward as systems can capture multiple referrals relating to a single event and incorrectly reflect these as re-referrals e.g. referrals from multiple agencies attending a single event would appear as re-referrals.

3.06.3

In recognition of this increasing demand the service has embarked on a service restructure that is focussed on: building on the processes that have been developed over the past twelve months; strengthening and integrating early intervention services as part of the front door response by the service; working alongside agencies who provide a high source of referrals (such as North Wales Police) to improve and streamline referral processes; strengthening and targeting the provision of family support services to children in need and looked after children. It is therefore critical that there is a synergy and direct correlation between the development of an early intervention/ prevention strategy and a looked after children strategy.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01

Social and Health Care Overview Scrutiny acknowledge the detail of the report and the developments that have both taken place and are underway in relation to the discharge of the Local Authority's duties in

respect of safeguarding and promoting positive outcomes for looked after children.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No impact resulting directly from this report

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

Not Applicable

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

No impact resulting directly from this report

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

The service restructure will be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

The service restructure will require amendments to the roles and responsibilities of key management posts.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

None

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

None

12.00 APPENDICES

None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **THURSDAY 23 JULY 2015**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)**

SUBJECT: **FOSTERING SERVICES INSPECTION REPORT**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To consider the Care and Social Services Inspection (2015) of the Flintshire Fostering Services and Subsequent Action Plan (Updated as of July, 2015)

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The fostering service was subject to a regular base line inspection which assessed whether the registration of the service is justified and the conditions of registration are appropriate. This addressed quality of life of children, with other themes being staffing, leadership and management and carers.

2.02 The inspection team identified the following positives.

- The service is described as very child focused, with all staff aware of each child's needs and circumstances
- The quality of the service has maintained with some improvements made despite some staffing pressures
- Monthly meetings are held for prospective applicants to maximise recruitment
- A DVD has been produced by foster carers and young people offering their personal testimonies and experience.
- Evidence of good recording of information with decisions about placements appropriately recorded.

2.03 The inspection identified one area of non-compliance in which independent members of the Fostering Panel were employees of Flintshire County Council. (This has now been addressed with the appointment of two new members not employed by the Local Authority).

2.04 Further proactive areas were identified to improve standards, these were

- The effective recruitment of sufficient carers
- Informal network support for Foster Carers

- Documentation to include feedback from Looked After Children Education (LACE)
- improvements in the role and function of the fostering panel coordinator have been made
- questionnaire formats do reflect distinct feedback of children & kinship carers

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 This builds upon successive inspection from 2003/2004. It recognises the strengths of the service during a period of staff transition and acknowledges the significant role of the Team Manager prior to her retirement in March 2015. This has now been taken on by the new Acting Team Manager, who was previously a Senior Practitioner on the team.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 Members review and comment on this report concerning how the Fostering Service continues to make effective progress, supporting foster carers and looked after children effectively.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 In direct relation to the Fostering Service, no significant concerns were noted around financial arrangements or their implication.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 No issues were noted or identified as part of the inspection outcome.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None were reported or identified.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 It is considered that the policies, procedures and practices adhere to and respond in accordance with the Local Authorities anti-discriminatory and practice principles.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 In the context of the inspection, some staff pressures were reported. It can be confirmed that the service, since April, 2015 has operated with new staff members.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 10.01 None were noted.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 As part of the inspection an extensive range of stakeholders were consulted including

- Children in Foster Care
- Foster Carers
- Staff from the Fostering Services
- Social Work Teams
- Managers
- Questionnaire responses

12.00 APPENDICES

- Fostering Inspection 2015
- Fostering Inspection Action Plan (updated) July 2015

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Flintshire Fostering Services
Flintshire County Council
County Offices
Chapel Street
Flint
CH6 5BD

Type of Inspection – Baseline

Date(s) of inspection – 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 10th, 11th, 12th February & 6th March 2015

Date of publication – 14th April 2015

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Summary

About the service

Flintshire County Council's fostering service (FFS) is based in Church Street, Flint and provides a range of placements for children and young people aged 0 -18 years. (Children and young people will hereafter be referred to as children).

Placements may be long or short term, for respite or with kinship carers. The responsible individual is Craig Macleod, Senior Officer for Commissioning and Planning. The manager of the fostering team is Liz Byrne.

At the time of the inspection the service had 120 approved fostering households providing a variety of full time, respite and kinship care placements. In addition there were 3 assessments for general fostering and 1 assessment for kinship care fostering in progress. A further 4 assessments were in progress where children had been placed in an emergency under regulation 38. 123 children were in placement with approved Flintshire Fostering Service carers with another 46 in respite and 4 having short breaks.

What type of inspection was carried out?

We (CSSIW) carried out an announced baseline inspection that addressed the quality of life for children and the other quality themes of staffing, leadership and management and carers. The inspection was undertaken by two inspectors by one and sometimes two inspectors over 7 days.

We attended;

- a matching meeting where the placement needs of children were discussed
- a fostering panel meeting

We read:

- the statement of purpose for the service,
- the children's guide
- children's electronic case files
- foster carer's electronic case files
- minutes of disruption of placement meetings
- minutes of the last three fostering panel meetings
- reports to the next fostering panel which took place shortly after the inspection
- statistical monitoring information

We spoke with:

- foster carers
- supervising social workers in the fostering team
- staff from the family and adolescent support service team (FAST), the family Intervention Team (FIT) and the Children and Younger Adults Support Team (CYAST).
- the fostering service team manager

•Service Manager (Resources)

•Chief Officer (Social Services)

We met with two children and their foster carers at their homes and we received questionnaires from four young people, two foster carers, seven fostering service staff and two panel members.

What does the service do well?

- The service is very child focussed with all staff aware each child's needs and circumstances.
- The quality of the service is being maintained and some improvements have been made despite staff shortages in the last year.
- Information sessions for prospective applicants are held monthly by fostering staff enabling them to complete activities that would have previously have been done at individual meetings.
- The team had produced a DVD about fostering and some Flintshire foster carers and young people had participated giving their experiences of fostering.
- The recording of supervision with foster team staff was in a format which enabled discussions and decisions about placements to be easily transferred into foster carer files.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The connected person's assessment process had been introduced and embedded into the service offered.
- Disruption meetings are chaired by 3 independent co-ordinators utilised by FAST.
- The service is now located alongside other child care teams in an open plan office in Flint thereby facilitating easier communication between the teams.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

We identified that there was one area of non-compliance with the requirements of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 (the regulations). The service was not compliant with regulation 24 (9) (b) which requires that the independent members of the fostering panel must not be appointed as such if they are employed by the fostering service provider. We found that two of the panel members identified as being independent members were employed in other parts of the county council.

We have identified areas where practice could be further developed to assist in improving the standard of the service provided. We found that:

- The service has not been able to recruit sufficient carers to be able to meet the needs of all the children referred to the service.
- Foster carers miss the informal networking that occurred at direct face to face training events.
- Foster carer reviews do not include feedback from the LAC education co-ordinator.
- Panel suggestions for improving their functioning were no longer being consolidated into revised policies and procedures through quality assurance and business planning events.
- The wording of questionnaires for children and young people about the quality of foster carers does not take into account the different circumstances of kinship carers.

Quality Of Life

Children and young people supported by FFS can be confident that they will have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted and, as a result will make good progress so they are able to achieve as much as they can in all areas of their lives.

It is evident that children and young people are treated with dignity and respect, by foster carers, social workers and other professionals within the Authority. The notes provided by visiting social workers indicate that they have developed good relationships with the children and young people and children feel able to talk to them and receive answers which are age and developmentally appropriate. We talked to a group of foster carers who stated that they always listen to the children and feel that they are good advocates for them, liaising with social workers, schools and other professionals on their behalf.

The foster carers have helped children to gain access to independent advocates where this was in the child's interests and we heard from a young person about their independent advocate. The children are encouraged to be part of the review of foster carers by completing a questionnaire, for which they receive a small reward, to give their own views of the placement. We saw that these views were included in the review of the foster carers that went to panel. We heard that a young person had refused to complete their questionnaire because they did not see it to be relevant to their kinship care. FFS had acknowledged the need to review their questionnaires. There is evidence on file that children have been involved in their own LAC review and have had the opportunity to discuss their views in private with the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

The Pride in Flintshire annual awards ceremony demonstrates the respect that the Authority gives to the achievements of children and young people who are looked after. Foster carers, members of the family placement team and senior management spoke with pride about how children had gained in confidence during their placement and had gained awards or taken part in the ceremonies. We heard from the Family & Support Team (FAST) that they were reviewing the timing and structure of the event to consider a whole day event to include the child and young people's wider support network. We spoke to the LAC Education Co-ordinator who was aware of the educational arrangements for and the progress of each looked after child. They had recently visited the proposed school for a young person placed with kinship carers in the south of England to ensure there were arrangements in place for the young person to have access to the welsh language which was important to them. Some of the budget available to the LAC education co-ordinator was used to provide extra tuition for children and young people to be able to achieve in education. Examples cited included language skills, GCSEs, army preparation courses and other specialised support. The fostering service also provided additional funds to support educational activities for children and young people.

Young people are able to follow interests, and develop skills. There was evidence in the files of children and young people of the opportunities that they had to participate in sports and other hobbies. One child showed a particular interest in sport and this was encouraged by attendance at a football club after school and cricket in the summer. Another child had developed an interest in drama and singing and this had been encouraged with attendance at drama club and choir. Another young person attended St

John's Ambulance and wanted to train to become a paramedic and yet another child was training as a brownie leader. There was also evidence on file of children taking part in school trips and having holidays abroad with their foster carers. Foster carers stated that following interests was actively encouraged and had enabled children to develop their confidence and self esteem and we saw how a particular activity for two young people was helping them to develop peer relationships. Additional funding was provided by FFS for particular activities.

Young people are supported to deal with difficult feelings and are helped to develop coping strategies where necessary. Foster carers stated that when support has been requested to assist in managing behaviour and difficult feelings, help has been provided. Foster Carers are able to access a number of training courses on line to help them to support children and have attended sessions provided by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service). There are a variety of services available to support children and young people. These include Action for Children and CAMHS. There is evidence within the files for children and young people that they have had support from these services.

Quality Of Staffing

Young people receiving a service from FFS can be confident that they will be supported by a stable and consistent staff team who are appropriately qualified, highly experienced and committed to providing a child centred service through their foster carers.

The main focus of the service is concerned with recruiting, assessing, training and supporting foster carers. We saw that there has been a year on year increase in overall activity with a 12% increase from April 2014 to February 2015. Staff have continued to build on undertaking viability assessments alongside child care social workers and from the 19 viability assessments for kinship carers completed between April 2014 to January 2015, 9 proceeded to connected person's assessments which were recommended for approval by the fostering panel. We saw that the connected person's assessments were comprehensive and thorough. Children and young people can be confident therefore that they will be placed with carers who will provide safety, security and attachment. We saw one connected person assessment where the young person had become much more calm and relaxed after placement with a relative but could not believe that it was really happening, and they were so pleased with the proposed long term plan for them. They were achieving well at school and despite having recently changed schools they had said that they felt they could now concentrate much better on their learning.

Young people can mostly be confident that there are sufficient staff within the fostering team to undertake their main tasks. However, the overall increase in activity with the rising number of kinship carers, matching meetings, permanency processes, special guardianship and applications for general fostering has placed extra demands on the team of 9 social workers (one of whom is a senior practitioner, one specialises in kinship care and one specialises in private fostering) and 2 children services assistants (CSA). A workload measurement and monitoring tool has recorded that the team is consistently working above the level of capacity. This has continued in the current year with the team carrying two vacancies, and one maternity leave cover. However, a qualified social worker who was working as a CSA covered one vacancy and subsequently secured the position of social worker so the vacancies remained at two. At the time of the inspection, one of the posts had been filled leaving one CSA vacancy.

Staff questionnaires mostly all indicated that vacant posts had caused additional duties for all members of the team and some expressed anxieties for the future with impending retirement of the team manager. One social worker felt that there was insufficient capacity to routinely support foster carers or in a crisis. The additional workload of the last two years had already caused some diminution of activities as priority had been given to court work, assessment and foster carer supervision. The result of this had been that joint support sessions with foster carers had not taken place in the last financial year and business planning for the team had been reduced to one session. Nevertheless, we learned that there was a positive culture of pulling together in the team and they felt well supported by the team manager and colleagues.

We saw that staff in the fostering team receive regular support and supervision from the manager and senior practitioner with team meetings usually held fortnightly. The recording of supervision with foster team staff was in a format which enabled discussions

and decisions about placements to be easily transferred into foster carer files and records showed comprehensive discussion and analysis. Evidence from four annual appraisals for staff demonstrated that staff were either fully competent in their roles or were exceeding expectations. Although it was acknowledged that training opportunities were limited for fostering social work staff we saw that they had continued in their professional development with the completion of attachment training, the ILM (institute of learning and management) award at level 3 and the practice teachers award. All the fostering team had undertaken training in the past 12 months. Children and young people can be confident that staff in the team are skilled and competent and they ensure that their knowledge base is continually up-dated.

Quality Of Leadership and Management

Foster carers, children in placement, their families and social workers can be confident that this is a fostering service where achieving positive outcomes for children and young people is the primary focus for the service whose manager drives up continuous service improvement and excellence by building effective partnerships, consulting with others and responding quickly to changes, concerns and complaints.

We assessed that this is a service that continually seeks to improve outcomes for the children in placements because the manager is very experienced, and manages the service with due care and attention. Business planning is an integral part of the team's functioning let down only by the need to prioritise monitoring outcomes for children and young people, supporting foster carers and other core activities when there are staff vacancies and resource issues to manage. We saw evidence of a systems thinking approach to improving the service wherein the duty system had been changed and the way in which foster carer recruitment had changed with the latter being, in part, responsible for the increase in the number of foster families increasing. An analysis of the sources of enquires to foster demonstrated the higher numbers originate via the internet and the service holds monthly information sessions for those people expressing an interest in fostering. Children and young people benefit from a service prepared to actively challenge itself and which is 'customer driven' in its improvement plans.

Young people can generally be confident that they will be matched appropriately with foster carers because there is a range of foster carers and the service undertakes a matching exercise and any long term placement matching proposal is presented to the fostering panel for consideration and recommendation or otherwise. Staff told us the service did not always have the numbers of foster carers they needed and, as fewer general foster carers are now being approved, this would likely provide less choice in the future. We observed a matching meeting for small child for whom an adoptive placement had not been successful and for whom existing foster carers had come forward as long term foster carers. We saw comprehensive reports available to the meeting which was chaired by the senior practitioner (FFS) and involved the supervising social worker (FFS), the child's social worker and an independent person. The process was very thorough and examined how the proposed foster carers would meet the child's needs in the short and long term, what impact it would have on their family and what, if any support they would need. We saw this potential match being scrutinised by panel and the foster carers attending to answer any queries that panel had.

FFS continues to develop the sophistication of its matching process and holds disruption meetings where there has been a breakdown in placement to understand the factors that may have contributed to the breakdown, including the matching process, and whether sufficient support had been provided and what lessons had been learned. The meetings are arranged by the FAST team and are chaired by an independent co-ordinator who will liaise with relevant parties prior to the meeting especially where they could not attend thereby giving the opportunity for open dialogue and objectivity. The views of the children were gained from them in their end of placement questionnaires, their independent reviewing officer and their social workers. We read the minutes of 4 meetings which demonstrated substantial dialogue and views and culminated in conclusions and

recommendations which were specific to the child and more general for social services. An example we saw was the recommendation that the views of a child's educational psychologist should be formally included, if appropriate, during the matching process of a looked after child with a foster carer. The service manager told us that general recommendations from disruption meetings are considered and adopted if possible and we saw that the fostering panel received and discussed the minutes of disruption meetings.

FFS operates its own fostering panel. We read panel minutes, attended a panel meeting and received returned questionnaires from panel members. There was evidence of members scrutinising reports and highlighting both positives and areas for further scrutiny which was then addressed with the presenting social worker and applicants. We saw that for each case presented, there was a summary of the rationale for the recommendation and the agency decision maker considered the issues discussed before making their decision.

However, we noted that the constitution of the panel was itself somewhat flawed because it did not comply with regulation 24 (9) (b) which requires that the independent members of the fostering panel must not be appointed as such if they are employed by the fostering service provider. We found that two of the panel members identified as being independent members were employed in other parts of the county council in child care related fields. Having discussed this with the team and service manager, we were encouraged how quickly this was resolved with the team manager reviewing all panel meetings and devising a strategy to manage the items addressed in the 3 panels which had not been quorate.

The panel was very efficient with experienced members, some of whom are entering their final term of office of 3 years. We saw the team manager kept a log of all attendees and was able to show us the panel members' electronic files noting all the relevant documentation required and annual reviews. We saw the information leaflet sent out to prospective applicants / attendees at panel which gave a pen picture of the panel member and their photograph. We saw that panel meetings include allocated time for business matters, disruption meetings, part IV meetings of the all wales child protection procedures (AWCPP), and variations, exemptions and placements made under regulation 38 (kinship carers). In addition to the applications to foster, panel considered the foster carer annual reviews held 12 months after approval. We noted that whilst panel agreed to recommend one foster couple's annual review, they asked for the next review to also be presented to them because they felt there was insufficient evidence of their experience of fostering yet.

The panel we attended, not only diligently scrutinised applications, they showed a great deal of sensitivity in welcoming the applicants, their supervising social workers and the child's social worker to the meeting acknowledging the stress it created in the applicants. Following the meeting, they came up with suggestions to improve the process and whilst the chair of panel said that they would incorporate improvements when possible did say that there hadn't been any business planning events in the last year and that training was limited for panel members. As the service was looking to recruit a replacement independent member and an elected member they anticipated the training that would be required and acknowledged the need to review and quality assure the functioning of panel to incorporate and consolidate the improvements being suggested by panel

members and officers.

Quality Of The Carers

Children, young people, their families and their social workers can be confident that the recruitment and preparation of foster carers result in a range of safe, skilled and thoroughly vetted foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children looked after by the authority. Foster carers can be confident that they will be well supported and trained throughout their careers but they cannot always be confident that their applications are processed in a timely way because of priority which has to be given to court directed work and the fact that staffing levels causes delays.

We found that overall the assessments of foster carers was accurate, focussed and analytical but there were delays in the process caused by the increase in recruitment of foster carers at a time of staff vacancies. The introduction of monthly information sessions for those people expressing an interest in fostering had resulted in increased numbers of people making applications and the increase in kinship foster carers resulting from the Public Law Outline process for viability assessments is likely to increase the overall workload.

Nevertheless, we found that overall the assessment and preparation of foster carers was thorough and to a good standard with applicants discussing the skills they would bring to fostering and relating these to the understanding of a young person's behaviour. Within case files we found assessments that were comprehensive and particularly in kinship carer assessments, a great deal of sensitivity had been used to enable an exploration of family issues. Within each of the files we saw there was a safe caring policy written to reflect and address household norms and we saw a review of these in response to issues that emerged. We saw there were foster carer agreements, delegated authority, matching minutes, dates of supervision, support visits and unannounced visits and training were recorded on the foster carers electronic record with an oversight by the FFS team manager during supervising social worker supervision.

The depth of the assessments undertaken, statutory checks made and the oversight by the team manager means that children can be confident they will be living with foster carers who can keep them safe and that immediate action will be taken should there be any doubt. We saw the minutes of a part IV meeting under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures (AWCPP) when an allegation had been made and a disruption meeting was subsequently held and other action was taken. The fostering panel considered all such minutes of meetings and thereby acted as another check in the process of safeguarding children as they did with any complaints made against the service.

The pre-approval training provided to fostering applicants is delivered by skills to foster and forms an important part of the assessment process. We saw the team members were either delivering some of the training or had received training for this to happen. An example we saw was the delivery of attachment training. Generally we saw a wide variety of on-line training that was available to foster carers and some took ample opportunity to participate. However some foster carers missed the direct face to face training opportunities because of the networking it gave. One foster carer called this 'coffee break training' and felt that for new foster carers it was hard for them to make contact with their assigned buddy/s when they had not met them informally on training or

in support groups. The group of foster carers we met made a similar point. We saw that foster carers had gained a number of qualifications in child development and health and social care for young people and had some requested specific courses to support their child in placement.

The amount and level of training undertaken by foster carers was included in the annual foster carer review, the first of which was presented to the fostering panel and thereafter to the service manager (resources) unless panel had requested a future presentation or circumstances, such as disruption or safeguarding concerns, warranted this. The process for the annual reviews of foster carers is well embedded with contributions from foster carers, supervising social workers, child care social workers and the children themselves. There is a financial incentive for children to complete a fostering service questionnaire. We heard that the LAC education co-ordinator was not asked for their contribution to a foster carer review but as we heard mostly positives from other services comprising the team around the child, this may be a missed opportunity. We heard from the FAST team how foster carers came up with creative solutions to issues and how they managed contact with a child's family to avoid disappointment for a child and ensure that, if contact did not happen as scheduled, the impact on the child was minimised. We heard how foster carers worked well with the child's mentors and other services provided with some foster carers excelling on working with schools and advocating for the child.

Foster carer support groups had not been as frequent in the last year because joint sessions with staff in FSS had not taken place. Support group events had been held and the support group for the foster carer's children, stepping stones, had continued. However, some foster carers told us that while they appreciated these fun / leisure activities they missed the sharing of information and learning from meetings with other foster carers. The reduction in foster carer support groups was because of the need to prioritise other work. We talked to the team manager about whether foster carers could, within the available budget, arrange more effective supports to meet their needs' to facilitate the informal support networks that they carers were missing. This was being considered.

How we inspect and report on services

We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. Both consider the experience of people using services.

- **Baseline inspections** assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

- **Focused inspections** consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focused inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

Further information about what we do can be found in our leaflet 'Improving Care and Social Services in Wales'. You can download this from our website, [Improving Care and Social Services in Wales](#) or ask us to send you a copy by telephoning your local CSSIW regional office.

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CSSIW INSPECTION REPORT OF FLINTSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICES

ACTIONS, OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS PLAN (APRIL 2015)

No.	ACTION	OUTCOME	RESPONSIBILITY & DATE
1.	Appointment of independent members, but not employed by the Local Authority	Two new Independent Members have been appointed	Commenced individually from June & July, 2015 Jenny Frost and Peter Robson
2.	Employ / recruit sufficient carers.	A review of the Recruitment and Marketing Strategy has been completed.	Jenny Frost, Jill Jones and Peter Robson Completed by April, 2015
3.	Informal networks to support foster carers.	Foster Care Coffee Mornings have been reinstated for 2015	Sue Gilligan : Dates of events are 21/05, 14/07, 08/09 & 10/11/2015
4.	Foster Carers Review to offer a section for feedback from the LACE Co-ordinator.	This will be incorporated into a wider review of the process	Jenny Frost September 2015
5.	Development of Panel procedures / policies and consolidated via a Business Planning Meeting (BPM).	A business day has been scheduled to set out key business aims and objectives.	Jenny Frost & Peter Robson 19/10/2015
6.	Questionnaires for children and young people to incorporate kinship care placement feedbacks.	This will be incorporated into a wider review of the process	Jenny Frost September 2015

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