

SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 15 th September 2016
Report Subject	Corporate Parenting and Fostering Strategy Update
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer for Social Services
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide Scrutiny with a Corporate Parenting and Fostering Strategies Update.

A comprehensive report on Corporate Parenting was presented to the Joint Education & Youth and Social & Health Care Overview Scrutiny Committee on 24 March 2016.

This purpose of this report is to advise Scrutiny of the action we have planned to take forward our commitment to be an effective Corporate Parent. Integral to delivering our Corporate Parenting responsibilities is ensuring that we have a sufficient supply of foster carers to support looked after children in stable local placements. The report provides an overview of local, regional and national work on developing fostering. In particular the report provides information about work to develop a National Fostering Framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Scrutiny endorse the commitment to recruit additional Foster Carers.
2	Scrutiny note proposals to develop a National Fostering Services and seek a report on the implications of the Service for Flintshire once these are known

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE CORPORATE PARENTING AND FOSTERING STRATEGY UPDATE
1.01	<p>Our Improvement Plan sets our commitment to develop a unified Corporate Parenting Strategy. The starting point for the strategy will be to establish what is important to looked after children. Over the Autumn we will work with the Participation Forum to develop a range of approaches to establish what looked after children expect from their Corporate Parents, and how they would like to see this delivered. It is also proposed that work is undertaken to reach a consensus on what we, as Corporate Parents, consider important for our looked after children. It is envisaged that this will include setting our commitments around the themes of Education, Health and Well-Being, Stability and Security and Leaving Care.</p>
1.02	<p>It is proposed that a task and finish group meets in early 2017 to develop this work, with an invite to Elected Members, as Corporate Parents themselves, to directly input into the development of the content of the Strategy document. It is intended that the Strategy will build on the positive work we currently undertake as well as developing new principles and commitments for supporting looked after children. As a reference point this work will draw on a Corporate Parenting Workbook produced by the Social Services Improvement Agency (SSIA) in June 2016. The Workbook is designed to provide useful pointers as to how Councillors can fulfil their duties as a corporate parent (a weblink is attached). Detailed proposals for developing the Corporate Parenting Strategy will be presented to the next available Children's Services Forum with the Strategy taken to Cabinet for approval when completed.</p>
1.03	Fostering
1.04	<p>As a good Corporate Parent we need to ensure that we have a sufficient supply of foster carers that are able to meet the needs of looked after children and provide them with a loving home. Flintshire's Fostering service is very well regarded. The service received a positive inspection report in 2015. The key area for development arising from the inspection was the recruitment of sufficient carers to meet the needs of all children referred to the service. Whilst Flintshire does well to attract foster carers there are challenges in ensuring we have a sufficient number of skilled foster carers to support older children and teenagers, including those with challenging behaviour. Flintshire is proactively working at a local, regional and national level to maximise the number of foster carers we can attract to meet local need.</p>
1.05	Local Context
1.06	<p>On any one day there are an average of 220 children looked after by Flintshire Social Services. 66% of our children are placed in foster care and the remaining children are placed with appropriate family/friends, placed for adoption, in residential homes, in independent living or placed with parents.</p>

1.07	Over recent years there has been an increase in demand for placements for older children and young people which has led to an oversupply of carers of younger children and under supply for the higher age group. Work is taking place with existing foster carers who would normally take young children to encourage and support them to foster older children which, if successful, should complement the targeted initiatives to recruit new foster carers for older children and young people.
1.08	We currently have 117 foster carers, 36 of whom provide kinship care. Over the next 3 years our ambition is to recruit 30 new foster carers with a specific focus on carers who have the skills to support teenagers. This is an ambitious task. In line with national approaches the foster care assessment process in Flintshire usually takes 6 months. The application and assessment process is detailed to ensure that we attract the right people, with the right skills. In addition the Team also make Special Guardianship placements. Over the last 18 months the Team have made 28 of these placements.
1.09	As part our strategy to increase foster carers proposals are being developed for Flintshire County Council to become a 'Foster Friendly Employer'. This approach recognises that there are people within our existing workforce with the right skills and qualities to become foster carers for the organisation. Research by the Department of Education highlights that "it is possible to combine fostering with other work if fostering services and employers are supportive and flexible". Proposals will be developed through Cabinet to develop our HR policies to support foster parents in our employment.
1.10	Regional Context
1.11	The 6 North Wales authorities have been working closely to develop joint working between Local Authority fostering service, where there are advantages in a joint approach. Achievements include:
1.12	Online Marketing
1.13	They set up a regional website and are running a pilot to see if paid internet adverts that put the website at the top of search results to increase the number of enquiries to local authority fostering teams.
1.14	Fees and Payments
1.15	Following an options appraisal work will take place to analyse the current schemes and look at areas where streamlining could take place without significant additional costs or to detriment of foster carers. This work is due to be completed by October 2016.
1.16	Streamlining Processes
1.17	A draft more concise foster carer assessment form has been produced which combines the preferred elements of the forms currently in use.
1.18	When I'm Ready
1.19	A joint approach was taken to prepare a regional policy and training package for the six counties and to share knowledge and experience.

1.20	National Context
1.21	Welsh Government have endorsed a principle to develop a national framework for the delivery of fostering services. The central aim in establishing a National Fostering Framework is to ensure that the best quality foster care placements are available to all the children and young people who need them in order to reach their full potential and that foster carers are valued, supported and receive excellent training.
1.22	It is important to note that the approach to developing a National Fostering Framework recognises the benefit of delivering some fostering services on a national and regional level whilst retaining the advantages of localism and local accountability. There is an almost unanimous view that the statutory responsibility for children should remain within individual local authorities.
1.23	<p>A national briefing note has been developed which is attached as Appendix 1. The briefing note:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provides background information on work done to date on establishing a National Fostering Framework. 2. Sets out the 'case for change' and the reasons why a National Fostering Framework is needed. 3. Describes the programme undertaken in Phase One (2015-16) 4. Informs key stakeholders about the current position 5. Identifies the lessons learnt from establishing the National Adoption Service
1.24	<p>The briefing note acknowledges that a National Fostering Framework is a means to an end and that its aims should to be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvements in permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision 2. A more cogent and compelling and strategic intent in relation to fostering services 3. Increased collaboration and co-operation by all stakeholders 4. Greater transparency about performance of fostering services and efficient use of resources 5. Economies of scale, where appropriate, but with a respect for localism 6. More shared services in planning and commissioning 7. Consistent use of 'Best Practice' models for recruiting and supporting foster carers and 8. Closer links to research and evaluation
1.25	<p>The work programme for the National Fostering Framework in 2016-17 includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an agreed framework for allocating responsibilities at a national, regional and local authority levels and begin work on putting the appropriate structures in place 2. Develop a National Performance and Resource Framework to provide greater transparency about the performance of each local authority's fostering service and the efficient use of resources 3. Establishing a Welsh identity for local authority Foster Care, a

	<p>national approach to marketing and use of social media for recruitment and retention</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Achieve greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care 5. Developing national arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector 6. Benchmarking best practice in Corporate Parenting across Councils and other public services, to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster placements
1.26	The Senior Manager for Children and Workforce has been nominated as a representative from the All Wales Heads of Children's Services on the National Fostering Framework Steering Group. This provides an opportunity to highlight the need for a National Service to bring value and support to local provision.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The development of a refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy will be within existing resources. The development of the National Fostering Framework will require input from operational staff as part of workshops, and data collection to maximise local benefit.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Looked after children will be consulted as part of the development of the refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	An impact/risk assessment of a National Fostering Services will need to be undertaken once there are clear proposals for the service.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1: National Fostering Framework: Briefing Note

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>http://www.ssiacymru.org.uk/resource/corporate-parenting-workbook-v2.pdf</p> <p>Contact Officer: Craig Macleod, Senior Manager Children and Workforce</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 701313</p> <p>E-mail: craig.macleod@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>(1) Looked After Children Looked after children are children and young people who are in public care and looked after by the state. This includes those who are subject to a care order or temporarily classed as looked after on a planned basis for short breaks or respite care. The term is also used to describe 'accommodated' children and young people who are looked after on a voluntary basis at the request of, or by agreement with, their parents.</p> <p>(2) Care Leaver Young people who have been in the care of the local authority and are deemed to be eligible for a leaving care services. i.e. young people who have had a period of care exceeding 13 weeks, from their 14th birthday, are entitled to ongoing support as they move into adulthood.</p> <p>(3) Corporate Parenting The Improvement and Development Agency has said "Corporate Parenting places collective responsibility on local authorities to achieve good parenting for all children in their care. It requires ownership and leadership at a senior level, and this includes all elected members."</p> <p>(4) Social Services Improvement Agency (SSIA) The SSIA is a specialist team dedicated to supporting improvement and transformational change within the social care system of Wales. The Agency offer a vital leadership role and work closely with organisations from across the public, third and independent sectors to drive improvement through shared innovation and close partnership working</p> <p>(5) When I am Ready From April 2016, young people in Wales will have a right to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18. This arrangement is known as the When I am Ready scheme. A foster carer must agree to the arrangement</p> <p>(6) Kinship Care Kinship care refers to the care of children by relatives or, in some circumstances, close family friends. Relatives are the preferred resource for children who must be removed from their birth parents because it maintains the children's connections with their families.</p>