SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 13th December 2018
Report Subject	Flintshire Foster Care Services
Portfolio Holder	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer Social Services
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Flintshire we have a well-run and effective Fostering Service. However, the service faces some significant challenges which include:

- attracting and developing foster carers to support an increasing cohort of children with complex needs, older children and sibling groups
- responding to court timelines to assess 'Connected Persons' which limits our capacity to assess general foster carers
- competing with Independent Fostering Agencies that offer higher financial remuneration for foster carers

This report explores the key challenges and the range of proactive, and innovative approaches the Service is taking in response.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
1	Scrutiny supports the current work of the Flintshire Fostering Services to provide its statutory and legal obligations as we move to the new Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act (RISCA) framework.
2	Scrutiny supports the service's approach of continued innovation to identify and implement new models of Foster Care arrangements
3	Scrutiny supports the realignment and investment of resources and staff in the development of the service which supports our approach to reducing residential 'out of county' placements

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	**BACKGROUND**
1.01	**RISCA**
	The service provides key statutory provision under The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003. In April 2019 the service will be registered and regulated under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act (RISCA). The Service is experienced in working under a regulatory framework and has been proactive in attending briefings on the new RISCA requirements to assist our transition to the new arrangements.
	General Foster Carers
	The Service responds to high levels of placement demand with robust assessment processes in place to ensure that potential foster carers have the requisite skills, motivation and aptitude for the challenges and rewards that Fostering bring.
1.02	General foster carers provide the foundation for the majority of care experiences for Children and Young People. Figure 1.Foster Carers 2015-2018 <table><tr><th>Year</th><th>General Carers</th></tr><tr><td>2015/2016</td><td>78</td></tr><tr><td>2016/2017</td><td>79</td></tr><tr><td>2017/2018</td><td>77</td></tr><tr><td>2018/2019</td><td>78</td></tr></table> These figures indicate the consistent number of general carers. However, the data masks some of the throughput that all Fostering Services experience with Foster carers leaving due to retirement, or personal choice not to continue in their role. We do know that we need to build our capacity to recruit and develop a higher number of foster carers to respond to growing placement demand.
	Connected Persons
	Connected person carers are often referred to as Kinship Carers. These carers are often Uncles / Aunties / Grandparents / elder siblings and very close knit family friends.

1.03	Figure 2.Connected Persons

Year	Connected Persons
2015/2016	36
2016/2017	41
2017/2018	46
2018/2019	50

These carers have a dedicated sub-team within the service. These numbers reflect both regional, Welsh and UK increase in this particular cohort of carers and reinforces the Welsh Governments targets of seeking to maintain children within their geographical area with access to peer, social, CAMH's and education provision. Whilst a positive choice for children and young people the assessment process for Connect Persons is usually aligned to court proceedings, where timelines are prescribed, and can draw our capacity to assess general foster carers.

1.04	**Market and Recruitment Strategy**

Underpinning the identifications of potential general carers is the Market and Recruitment Strategy which seeks to utilise modern methods of social media to be at the forefront of recruitment activities in the region. The objectives of the strategy are;

- To identify specific general carers
- To identify specific carers who provide Parent and Child placements
- To identify specific carers for our Repatriation and Prevention scheme in conjunction with Action For Children
- To identify specific carers who can provide care to sibling groups
- To identify specific carers for Children and Young People with complex health, disability or life limiting conditions.

It should be noted we operate in a highly competitive market environment, where private foster care agencies can offer greater financial reward. However, from our research it is apparent that many applicants choose the LA as the combination of support and financial means, are of greater incentive in becoming our carers.

1.05	**Special Guardianship Orders**

The service operates a distinct Special Guardianship team. This recognises that where connected persons, general carers and children subject to legal proceedings wish to have more autonomy in the daily decision making of the child(ren) in their care. We currently operate under the recently implemented Special Guardianship Order (2016) policy, practice and guidelines.

Figure 3. SGO 2017-2019

Year	Numbers
2017/2018	10
2018/2019	6

These numbers refer to the number of children who were made subject to SGO's. In both years approximately 50% were in connected / general care settings whilst the remaining percentage was made up of legal proceedings or where SGO are issued in substitute for foster care.

1.06	Innovation, Awards and Rewards

The service provides a well-respected range of care to a diverse group of children and young people. We are however aware of the need to maintain a competitive advantage by recognising good areas of practices, a dynamic recruitment process and the innovations of new models of care.

1.07	Good Areas of Practice

Importantly these have provided invaluable media attention and acts as an excellent avenue to promote the service. In recent years we have been the recipients of the following awards;

- Fostering Friendly Employer of the Year 2017
- The Fostering Network's Excellence Award for contribution by a Foster Care 2018
- The Fostering Network's Excellence Awards for Sons and Daughters 2018

We have also been at the forefront of regional and national developments including:

- Kinship Best Practice Guide (2018)
- Market and Recruitment Strategy (2018)

Both these awards and practice guidance's demonstrate a dynamic within the service to ensure we maintain a pro-active approach and further reinforces the commitment of our carers to provide high quality care.

Innovation
We have recently been awarded a £30,000.00 grant through the NESTA 'Innovate to Save' grant scheme having been subjected to an extensive application process. This funding will provide the financial resources to research a new model of foster care. (See Mockingbird Programme below).

Mockingbird Programme
We are seeking to implement a research tested model of care called the Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme of family care. This centres on

a constellation where one foster care home acts as a hub, offering planned and emergency respite, advice, training and support to six to ten satellite fostering families. The model emanates from the Mockingbird society in America (2004) (see below)

Figure 4. Illustration of the Model
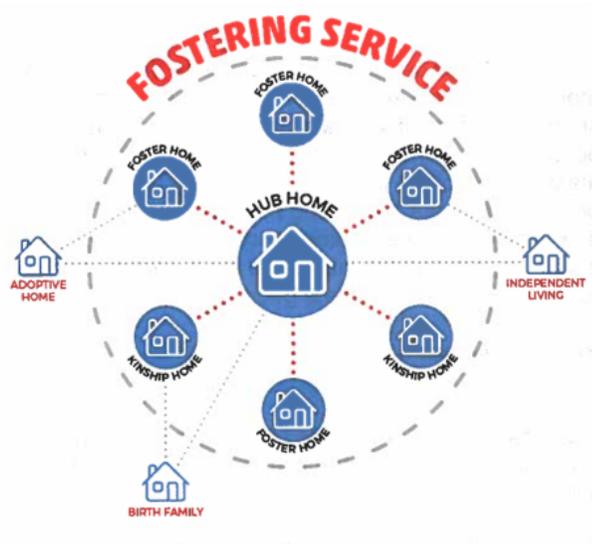
The Model builds upon the following;

- Strong relationships with those in the constellation
- Empowering families to support each other
- A reduction in the number of placement breakdowns
- The development of a robust and resilient structure which offers support through times of crisis and transition
- Higher level of Foster Carer retention and recruitment
- Better contact levels between birth family members
- Costs saved (avoidance of expensive out of county provision)

Within England testimony from Local Authorities as diverse as London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Stockport to Hertfordshire indicate the net values of the programme. In total there are 18 LA and three private fostering agencies having adopted the model.

The 'Innovate to Save' scheme will develop the business case for the implementation of the Mockingbird Model in Flintshire, including the associated cost and funding model. If Flintshire County Council then proceed to implement the model, it will be the first to do so in Wales.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	There is a clear recognition that in an environment of competitive advantage and challenge we need to ensure sufficient staff resources are available to

	assess and support foster carers, whilst creating the capacity to develop new service models and approaches.
2.03	Resources are being realigned to enable the appointment of an additional Senior Practitioner (temporary up until 2019) to assist with the daily management of the service and implementation of the changes noted. The Mockingbird research will consider whether a business case can be evidenced for sustained efficiencies that would enable the continued funding of the post, and in turn continued development of the Service.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	The research into the Mockingbord model will involve extensive consultation and engagement with Foster Carers to develop their understanding and interest in the model as well as influencing how it can be successfully applied in Flintshire.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	The potential for failing to comply with RISCA is being managed through the development of an action plan to ensure that we implement the necessary requirements within the prescribed timelines.
	Failure to develop our Service and attract Foster Carers will lead to an increased reliance on expensive, and potentially inappropriate, residential placements.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None. **Contact Officer:** Peter Robson **Telephone:** 01352 70128 **E-mail:** peter.robson@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None.