



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18TH JUNE 2019

SUBJECT: CAERPHILLY FOSTERING SERVICE UPDATE

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Fostering Service a year on from the implementation of the revised Fee and Payments structure, as requested by the Committee on 1st May 2018.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Scrutiny Committee is fully aware of the pressures facing Children's Services and in particular the pressure of increasing numbers of children Looked After, increasing complexity and challenging behaviours and the relentless demands made by the Courts. These pressures are compounded by the availability of suitable placements for children.
- 2.2 The report presented to Scrutiny Committee in May of last year identified that Caerphilly had been experiencing a year on year net loss in the number of foster placements being provided. That report identified that, despite a positive radio advertising campaign and an increased number of enquiries to Caerphilly, prospective carers were choosing to apply to other Local Authorities or Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) because of the remuneration packages being offered. The Committee was advised that Caerphilly's foster carer fee levels were one of the lowest in Wales and this was impacting on the ability to recruit sufficient carers.
- 2.3 As a result, new enhanced fees and other allowances were proposed with significant investment being required to support this. These proposals were considered by Scrutiny Committee in May 2018 and were ratified by Cabinet in June 2018. This report provides Committee with an update on the impact of the new Fee structure and an overview of the service more generally for Committee Members information.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committee are requested to note the content of this report and the positive improvements across the service area.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To ensure Scrutiny Committee is fully aware of the activity across the Fostering Service over the last 12 months and recognises the hard work and commitment of all those involved.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Along with the Social Work Teams, Foster Carers are the most valuable resource within Children's Services. Their dedication, commitment, hard work and care mean that many of the most vulnerable children in Caerphilly are supported to achieve their full potential. Relationships children make with foster carers very often last into their adulthood.
- 5.2 As a result, fostering can be a highly rewarding career choice but consultation undertaken with Caerphilly carers early in 2018 identified a high level of dissatisfaction. Whilst all carers confirmed they were very happy with the support provided by the Fostering Team, the mainstream foster carers all felt that their fee levels did not reflect the level of commitment they are expected to demonstrate and as a result they were feeling undervalued. As stated at paragraph 2.2, having reviewed the fee levels across the region, it was clear that the remuneration package required an overhaul if we hoped to recruit more carers.

Remuneration:

- 5.3 All foster carers receive a weekly allowance for each child placed with them based on 3 age bands of 0-4 years, 5-10 years and 11+ years. These allowance levels are set annually by Welsh Government and are referred to as the National Minimum Allowance (NMA). The current NMA rates for 2019/20 are as follows:

0-4 years: £181 per week
5-10 years: £165 per week
11+ years: £206 per week

- 5.4 Prior to June 2018, Caerphilly was operating a three tier foster carer structure consisting of Probationary, Mainstream and Career Carers with significantly different fee levels as follows:

Probationary Carer: £50 per week
Mainstream Carer: £68 per week
Career Carer: £176 per week

- 5.5 As a result of the consultation, it was proposed that all approved foster carers would receive the same fee but that this fee would vary depending upon the age of the child and would therefore be linked to the NMA age bandings above. For the current financial year, the fee levels are:

0-4 years: £128
5-10 years: £164
11+ years: £185

- 5.6 Whilst this revised fee structure was significantly higher than the previous arrangement, it served to bring Caerphilly up to the level of their competitors and was very well received by the foster carers.

- 5.7 In addition, the following was also agreed:

- Fees would increase annually in line with the Council's annual pay award for staff
- The re-introduction of a Birthday Allowance (£100) and Christmas Allowance (£200)
- Automatic entitlement to 2 weeks holiday allowance
- The Service would implement savings for children Looked After in line with the NMA recommendations.

- 5.8 The full year cost of implementing the new remuneration package was £291k. Service specific reserves were utilised in order to implement the package from the 1st June 2018 and to allow time for Children's Services budgets to be realigned going forward.

Recruitment:

- 5.9 With the successful radio campaign continuing to be funded and with foster carers stating they were now proud to be fostering for Caerphilly, the Team maximised on their recruitment activity.
- 5.10 2018/19 is the first year that the service has reported a net increase in foster carers and placements offered. The overall increase to date has been 15 foster care households offering 20 placements.
- 5.11 In addition, enquiry rates continue to remain high and there are currently 10 prospective carers at various stages of the assessment process.
- 5.12 Our main competitors are the independent sector and we can report that we have had approaches from 8 IFA carers interested in transferring to Caerphilly.
- 5.13 Of most significance is the fact that we have reduced our reliance on the IFA's by 16 placements which, even at conservative levels, has saved the Council at least £500k over a full year.
- 5.14 The "Foster:Caerphilly" website has been updated and is ready to be relaunched – offering a more interactive experience for both prospective and existing carers. Together with a greater presence on Social Media including 'Feel Good Friday' on Facebook, awareness of Caerphilly is growing across the region.
- 5.15 Caerphilly celebrated the National Fostering Fortnight between Monday 13th and Friday 24th May with a range of activities and daily media coverage including:
- 'Five Miles x Five Days' walk across the County Borough supported by Elected Members
 - Reception on route at Ty Penallta with Cabinet
 - Sponsored runners in the Caerphilly 10k run
 - Annual consultation event with all foster carers
 - Cascade Quilters were in Ty Penallta showing the blankets and quilts they are donating to children Looked After

Conclusion

- 5.16 There is no question that the new remuneration package has had a direct impact on recruitment of new foster carers. Equally, it has had a direct impact on existing foster carers who report feeling valued and feeling part of the Caerphilly Team. Combined with the on-going training and support provide by the Fostering Service, Caerphilly has strengthened its position in the region.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions made or presumed in this report.

7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 7.1 Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.
- 7.2 Children's Services Commissioning Strategy 2015-2020.
- 7.3 Statutory Foster Care Regulations.

7.4 Corporate Plan 2018-2023

The content of this report impacts contributes towards Well Being Objective 6: Support citizens to remain independent and improve their well-being.

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

8.1 The content of this report contributes to the following Well Being Goals:

- A resilient Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities

The report is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act as follows:

- Long Term – the implementation of the improved remuneration package for foster carers contributes to the longer term sustainability and resilience of the Caerphilly Fostering Service effectively 'future proofing' the service.
- Prevention – the Service was losing foster carers year on year and could not be sustained. The new remuneration package has had a direct impact on the increased recruitment of foster carers placing the service in a much more positive position
- Integration – increasing the pool of foster carers has a direct impact on Children's Services and Social Services as a whole by reducing costs and budget pressures through reduced reliance on the private sector.
- Collaboration – the whole review of the service has been conducted in full collaboration of foster carers.
- Involvement – the service review has been conducted in full consultation with the foster carers, staff team and other partners.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This report is for information purposes only, so the Council's full Equality Impact Assessment process does not need to be applied.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The funding for these proposals was secured in 2018/19, therefore there are no financial implications arising from this report.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no personnel or HR implications arising from this report.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 The report is for information purposes and reflects the views of consultees.

13. STATUTORY POWER

13.1 Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.

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