

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021**

**CWM TAF REGIONAL FOSTERING FRONT DOOR**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR C LEYSHON**

**Author(s): Alastair Cope, Regional Development Manager**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update to Corporate Parenting Board on the recruitment and retention of foster carers, with a focus on the regional front door for fostering recruitment.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that members note the information contained in the report regarding fostering recruitment and the performance information provided.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Regional front door for Fostering recruitment was established in April 2019 as a joint collaboration between RCT CBC and Merthyr Tydfil CBC to address some of the concerns about the numbers of foster carers recruited, the speediness of responses to enquires and the quality of recruitment work being undertaken.
- 3.2 The regional team consists of a Regional Development Manager leading on the project, a Regional Marketing Officer and a Regional recruitment Officer. The primary objective of the team is to achieve a net gain in approved mainstream foster carers.
- 3.3 We aim to achieve this by adopting a content-led marketing and communications strategy and a customer focussed approach that streamlines the time taken from point of enquiry to allocation for assessment. Achieving this primary objective should also result in us placing less children in out of county placements.

- 3.4 The recruitment strategy outlines the approach we will take to recruit more residents to become foster carers for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.
- 3.5 The initial period of establishing the service was spent adapting to the new team structure and reviewing the existing approaches to fostering recruitment. We are now beginning to see the impact of having a dedicated in-house provision for fostering recruitment.
- 3.6 The first quarter of the year in 2020/21 was impacted substantially by the Covid:19 pandemic where we saw enquiry numbers drop substantially and normal recruitment processes had to cease. The service quickly adapted its' methods of undertaking recruitment visits, IV's, assessments, skills to foster pre-approval training and foster panel, which has seen a continuation of enquiry, application and assessment processes since April 2020.
- 3.7 The NFF Post Approval Learning and Development Framework is currently being implemented across RCT. A launch event took place in November 2019 involving foster carers, supervising social workers, panel members and training leads. The framework adds consistency to learning and development for foster carers across wales and professionalises foster carers through the implementation of a formal learning and development plan, which will be embedded into supervision and annual review. The learning and Development framework and use of the personal development record and plan started to be implemented in April 2020 to all approved RCT foster carers.

#### **4. Performance Data**

##### **4.1 Performance Data- Year on Year**

	<b>Enquiries</b>	<b>Initial Visits</b>	<b>Assessments Allocated</b>	<b>Approvals</b>
<b>2018-19</b>	146	24	17	13
<b>2019-20</b>	140	34	24	4
<b>2020/21 (to Q3 only)</b>	93	38	16	6

#### 4.2 Performance Data- Cumulative Q1, Q2 & Q3 2020-21 Enquiry to Assessment Numbers

2020/21	Enquiries	Recruitment Visits	Initial Visits	Assessments Allocated	Approvals
Number	93	69	38	16	6
Conversion rate from Previous Stage	NA	74.2%	55.1%	42.1%	37.5%
Conversion rate from Initial Enquiry	NA	74.2%	40.9%	17.2%	6.5%
<b>2019/20</b>					
Number	114	64	30	15	2
Conversion rate from Previous Stage	NA	56.1%	46.9%	50%	13.3%
Conversion rate from Initial enquiry	NA	56.1%	26.3%	13.2%	1.8%
<b>+/-</b>					
	-21	+5	+8	+1	+4

#### 4.3 Average length of time taken from initial Enquiry

	Follow up Call	Recruitment Visit	Initial Visit	Allocated Assessment
2020/21	1 day	1.5 days	4.9 days	30.1 days
2019/20	1 day	4.6 days	11.9 days	55.1 days
2018/19	4.8 days	N/A	35 days	66.2 days

#### 4.4 Foster Carer Retention Data

Year	Approvals	Terminations	Net
2017/18	14	14	0
2018/19	13	11	+2
2019/20	4	14	-10
2020/21 (to Q3 only)	6	9	-3

## **5. Analysis**

- 5.1 Although enquiries have dropped in the first three quarters compared with the previous year, this reflects the impact of the Covid:19 pandemic. This coincided with the start of the financial year and initial enquiries dropping substantially during the early part of the pandemic.
- 5.2 As lockdown has eased, enquiries have started to increase and the gap between this years and last year's enquiry numbers closing. The positive is that although Wales entered a new national lockdown in November 2020, enquiries increased substantially from those during the same quarter last year.
- 5.3 The team have adapted well to the way it responds to enquiries considering restrictions in place. With a process adapted quickly in response to the pandemic, timescales have reduced substantially from enquiry to IV stage, largely due to the fact this is now being completed remotely and applicants availability due to being at home instead of having to arrange around work commitments etc.
- 5.4 It is encouraging to see an increase to the numbers of initial visits taking place, along with those proceeding into assessment and approval numbers. The fact that our recruitment officer left post at the start of the quarter has not impacted on response times or the application process being completed, largely due to the secondment agreed for the Fostering Services Apprentice to cover the role on a temporary basis.
- 5.5 The conversion rate from Initial Enquiry to the pre assessment Initial Visit screening has increased from 26.3% to 40.9% compared to the figures from 2019/20. This has been supported by a dedicated recruitment officer offering consistency throughout the new adapted process and being able to progress to IV phase at a faster rate than previously due to the availability of applicants. There continues to have been a benefit to having a localised responsive service in place.
- 5.6 The conversion rate from initial enquiry to proceeding into full assessment has increased from 13.2% to 17.2% compared to the figures from 2019/20. The fact that the timescales for IV process have improved significantly, there are regular monitoring meetings between Recruitment Officer and Assessments Manager and having some capacity within the service to allocate Form F assessments to has assisted this improvement, alongside the development of an online skills to foster course.
- 5.7 Response times from initial enquiry to both follow up recruitment call, initial visit and allocation of form F assessments have improved

significantly than of the previous two years, this again can be attributed to applicant's availability in addition to dedicated staffing at the front door.

## **6. Future Developments**

- 6.1 We hope to continue to see an upturn in enquiries during quarter 4, as people have had time to put into action the attention and interest that the various content we have developed has generated. As the process for assessments during the Covid:19 pandemic has now been developed and in operation since May 2020, we should also see a continued improvement in the number of applicants progressing from enquiry stage to assessment. The recruitment team are now coordinating Skills to Foster preapproval training, which has helped with the transition between enquiry and assessment and has added capacity for additional courses across the region, therefore minimising delay.
- 6.2 The fostering service are currently looking at options to increase assessment capacity, the recent appointment of a senior practitioner within the placement team has supplemented capacity within the fostering service and we will continue to work with the support team to identify opportunities to minimise the use of independent assessors where possible.
- 6.3 A comprehensive recruitment and marketing strategy is in place, including introducing more paid advertising on Facebook, the use of a Digi-van campaign and generating more case studies from our current foster carers, which we hope will raise attention and interest of fostering across the Authority in addition to appealing to those people who have recognised the work life balance of working from home, or been placed onto reduced hours as a result of the pandemic.
- 6.4 Plans are in place for further regional collaboration with Bridgend CBC and they are expected to join the regional front door in April 2021, with the implementation work being undertaken currently. It is hoped this will build on the existing regional front door and exploration of regional campaigns will take place to share resources and attract new foster carers to all three Local Authorities.

## **7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

An Equality and Diversity Assessment is not required as part of this information report.

## **8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

There are no financial implications.

## **9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

A Memorandum of Understanding between the two Local Authorities has been developed alongside representatives from Children's Services and Legal and Democratic Services to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

## **10 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.**

The regional front door for fostering recruitment and the NFF compliment the Council's corporate priorities to promote independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring Rhondda Cynon Taf's children and young people will receive a great start in life.

## **11 CONCLUSION**

The challenges facing local authorities in the recruiting and retention of mainstream foster carers has been well documented through the work of the National Fostering Framework as reported in phase 1, 2 and 3 reports.

This report provides members with an update regarding the Cwm Taf Regional Fostering Project and fostering front door, as well as outlining performance through the data set provided.

The development of the Regional Front Door for Fostering Recruitment will continue to provide a consistent, robust, responsive and professional service to those people who are interested in becoming foster carers for Rhondda Cynon Taf.



**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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