



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

18TH NOVEMBER 2024

FOSTER WALES COLLABORATION UPDATE

REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES, IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

Author: Amy McArdle; Regional Development Manager

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update to Corporate Parenting Board about the recruitment and retention of foster carers, with a particular focus on adopting the Foster Carers Charter and Eliminate Profit Policy impacts.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board

- 2.1 note for information the impact on adopting the Foster Carers Charter to practise change and the improvement in Foster Carers positive experience and retention.
- 2.2 to consider the need to adapt and invest in our Foster service to meet the future needs of a fostering service in a not for profit market.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To improve the experiences of our foster families and to assure any prospective foster carers on the support they will receive and the experience they should expect as foster carers with Foster Wales RCT. To ensure the service is fit for purpose with the growth of foster carer numbers from recruitment and potential transferring carers from the private sector.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 As part of the Foster Wales collaborative all 22 local authorities have committed to bringing in an initial set of national commitments one of these is to adopt a Foster Carers charter, where the corporate parents, fostering services and foster carers together commit to areas which will improve the experiences of the whole fostering family including the looked after child or young person. The proposed foster carer charter has been provided as an attachment and outlines the commitment of all three stakeholder groups. The addition of the charter to the Foster Wales national commitment came from various reports and surveys, that indicated that foster carers across Wales didn't always feel they were seen as an equal in the team around the child and that their understanding and experiences of the child were not always listened to or valued in case planning decision making. This was reflected in consultations carried out with foster carers from RCT. Foster carers felt that by all members of the corporate parent and children's services adhering to the principles of the charter, they would feel more heard and their role better respected. Foster carers expressed that this was one of the main reasons they didn't actively encourage new people into fostering. Although they are committed themselves to the children, their experiences on times are often more difficult than they feel necessary.
- 4.2 The impact of Foster Wales RCT not retaining and recruiting enough local authority mainstream foster carers is important to note. These include a lack of suitable placements for children who may have a range of complex needs to be met, the reduced availability of placement choice provides challenges for Foster Wales RCT in trying to ensure we can match effectively and support placement stability. There is a significant financial impact for the council in terms of having to use independent foster agencies (IFA's) whose costs per placement are significantly higher than in-house provision. A further impact when using IFA's can be the risk of instability for the child, who may have to move out of their local area, change schools, friendship groups and support networks.
- 4.3 We must be forward thinking and proactive when considering the direction of Fostering, particularly considering the Eliminate profit policy coming in 2027. Although we predict adopting and committing to the charter will impact on retention of foster carers, it is important to note that to sustainably grow the fostering provision we need more than just this. Foster Wales RCT currently has one of highest foster carer caseloads across Welsh local authorities, which significantly impacts the consistency of support foster carers receive. An inability to develop the service sustainably due to time capacity and the lack of time to nurture and develop new foster carers to ensure they are

competent and confident to take on the needs of the children we really need to place long term and out of residential.

- 4.4 Current recruitment picture; due to investment in a recruitment officer from Foster Wales National Grant fund we have seen a fast improvement in the numbers of new foster carers in assessment over the last 12 months. It must first be recognised this post is only currently funded until October 2025, and consideration of the importance of this post must be looked at over 2025.

Enquiries			Initial Visits			Approvals		
	23/24	24/25		23/24	24/25		23/24	24/25
April	4	7	April	1	3	April	0	2
May	7	13	May	3	1	May	2	1
June	6	7	June	3	3	June	1	1
July	5	8	July	1	3	July	0	0
Aug	11	25	Aug	2	6	Aug	0	1
Sept	5	8	Sept	3	2	Sept	0	1
Oct	5	6	Oct	1	5	Oct	1	1
Nov	16		Nov	1		Nov	0	
Dec	13		Dec	1		Dec	0	
Jan	17		Jan	9		Jan	3	
Feb	6		Feb	3		Feb	1	
Mar	26		Mar	4		Mar		
Total	121	75	Total	32	23	Total	8	7
Target	101	121	Target	34	52	Target	13	21
Deficit	20	-46	Deficit	-2	-29	Deficit	-5	-14

- 4.5 As the table shows, 2024/25 is likely to far outreach the outcomes achieved in 2023/24. Currently we have 7 new foster carers approved since April, as opposed to 8 in total across the previous year. We are predicting 3 more fostering families approved before the end of December and we have 17 more in the current assessment process, with plans for approval within the next 6 months.

4.6 Our current recruitment strategy for 2024/25 is outlined in the plan on the page below;

Analysis	Strategy	Actions						
<p>KPI forecast</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Enquiries</td> <td>121</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Home Visits</td> <td>52</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Approvals</td> <td>21</td> </tr> </table> <p>Drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using fostering friendly as a vehicle for internal comms across council staff – Amy • Face to face activity and real life stories through using all local areas of RCT – Since November 15 pop up's/events attended (20 weeks since starting) • Promoting foster across the council – Jo/Rach • Use of our pioneers and their passion. Tracy – events. Matthew & Tracy G – Recruitment activities. • Promotion of their retention events • Very active peer support groups, engaged carers groups, decent engagement in closed Facebook group – Active pioneers. • Very positive and cherished supervising social workers • Retention payment twice a year • Q&A teams session within full assessment journey. • Online information session • Regular communication throughout process, sending regular texted. Celebrating seasons, birthdays. • Targeting specific communities, not just our larger town centres. Scratched the surface. Small start in Pontyclun, Treorchy. • Care friends <p>Inhibitors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff capacity and engagement with 	Enquiries	121	Home Visits	52	Approvals	21	<p>Needs Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11+ • Parent & Child • Support care • Step Down from Residential • UASC <p>Key Issues</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Size of Borough- not being able to reach local communities due to capacity and budget being stretched thinly over a large region 2. Targeting poor conversion of enquiries 3. Engage and educate all council teams on Foster Wales, the need and how they can support <p>Strategies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a layered targeted Marketing Strategy in 2 communities across the Borough to trial impact when focusing funds and activity 2. Improve current conversion rates with better analysis and improved recruitment journey from allocation to approval 3. Improve understanding of the need for more foster carers, Foster Wales and eliminating profit agenda across internal staff council wide <p>Goals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To evidence the need for further capacity and financial resource to enable us to reach a wide area 2. Increase enquires from those localized areas – measured by increase in enquires and percentage enquires from certain 	<p>Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending team meetings • Develop video content for other directorates to share cross staff • Continue making best use of internal comms channels and use of any physical space that we can have in and around council buildings. • Work with RMO to reflect/review quality of leads <p>Consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use fostering friendly hook to encourage staff around working and fostering. • Targeted paid campaigns in identified postcodes. • Use business details to send out posters and fostering partner information pack. <p>Conversion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do we have engaged pioneers who can support as ambassadors in that area. • Develop a layered approach in these areas- joining community groups online, reaching out to local groups face to face. • Seeking local events to attend in these areas. • Developing relationships with education clusters in these areas. • RO to continue to engage pioneers within recruitment activities • RO to continue to engage foster carers around Care Friends App – use closed groups to advertise monthly • RO to continue attending foster care support groups to promote recruitment activities and Care Friends App. • RO to continue to engage with applicants
Enquiries	121							
Home Visits	52							
Approvals	21							

<p>team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship with other teams, e.g. children's teams • Staffing of events • Size of service • Size of borough- not being able to reach real local communities • Drop out rates of assessments <p>Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calon and Compass very active • Cost of living and competitive fees • Conversion rate <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of borough- bigger pool and variety of people • Opportunity to build relationship with local councilors and influencers • Communicating the types of fostering, types of children in need for support. • Being able to post as a business in local community groups particularly events – start within the 4 areas with regards to events. • Targeting specific communities, not just our larger town center's. Pontyclun, Treorchy, Ferndale/Porth, Gilfach. • Use our pioneers to target their own local communities • Joint events for retention and recruitment • Supermarket opportunities 	<p>locations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Launch fostering partners 4. To evidence the need for further capacity and financial resource to enable us to reach a wide area 5. Increase enquires from those localized areas – measured by increase in enquires and percentage enquires from certain locations 6. Improve conversion rate from IE to IV 7. Improve conversion rate of allocation to approval 8. Develop a prospect journey where new carers feel better prepared for the role in the first year of fostering. 	<p>throughout the application process to adapt the best service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RO to continue to engage and identified pioneer carers to support the work and enhance the prospect journey • Ro to continue to schedule and hold pioneer Q&A sessions during full assessment stage <p>Loyalty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map where our current carers live and what local areas may be to focus on • Complete analysis of those who dropped out, identify trends and areas of work • Complete the national process mapping analysis to identify key weak points and what LAs to learn from who are working successfully in that area <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where do we have engaged pioneers who can support as ambassadors in that area • Engage identified Pioneer carers to support the work and enhance the prospect journey • Develop training for Independent Assessors
---	---	--

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY

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

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

7.1 There are no legal implications.

8. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

8.1 Foster Wales national work programme complements 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.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention has never been more of a priority. In the picture of a not-for-profit world, we need to ensure where possible we have sufficient choices within our own foster carer community for all current and future looked after young people and children. It is paramount that current and future fostering households are well supported, engaged, and developed to meet the needs of our young people. We ask for all councillor support in communicating this need to our communities and their networks across RCT. Along with committing to the adoption and implementation of the Foster Carer Charter proposed to ensure our fostering families have all the need from the Corporate Parents to ensure our children thrive.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

18TH NOVEMBER 2024

Officer to contact: Amy McArdle Regional Development Manager
Amy.mcardle@rctcbc.gov.uk