

Meeting: Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

Date: Tuesday 8 January 2013

Report Title: Recruitment of Foster carers for Children in Care

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## **1 Purpose of this Report**

- 1.1 To provide an overview of past, current and future activity in relation to the recruitment and retention of the current internal Telford & Wrekin(T&W) Foster carer workforce, required to meet the needs of children in care.
- 1.2 To note the improvements made to our recruitment model to increase our pool of internal foster carers to meet specific needs and further increase our positive placements stability.
- 1.3 To note the specific challenges, which have impacted upon recruitment activity during 2012/13.

## **2 Telford & Wrekin's Internal Fostering Service- historical context**

- 2.1 Telford & Wrekin Co-Operative Council, acquired the responsibility of running its own Fostering service when the authority became a unitary authority in 1998.
- 2.2 National Statutory Childcare legislations governs how Local Authorities and Independent Sector providers, manage and deliver fostering provision. Fostering provision, is highly regulated by specific standards, regulations, schedules, guidance and subject to separate and integrated inspections for Children in Care by Ofsted.
- 2.3 The Telford & Wrekin(T&W) Fostering service within the last 7 years has had other services added to its core fostering business ,as a consequence of national legislation, and internal decisions as to where to locate specific service provision. These added services are: Private Fostering introduced nationally in 2005; Special Guardianship and Residence order assessments, transferred from the Joint Adoption Team to the Fostering service during 2008; New national guidance on services to Family and Friends carers introduced in October 2011 and significant revisions to the National Fostering Standards and regulations , introduced in April 2011.
- 2.4 As a consequence of the additions to the functions of the fostering service frontline additions were made. The restructure of the Safeguarding service addressed some significant service limitations in relation to managerial capacity and a 2<sup>nd</sup> Team Manager was created along with 2 senior social work posts. This has enabled us to realign our service provision into 2 teams- one leading on Mainstream fostering and short breaks. The other team leading on Family and Friends provision . The 2<sup>nd</sup> Team Manager ( new post – for Family and Friends Team) took up post in late August 2012 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Senior social worker is due to take up post in February 2013. The Managerial capacity between December 2010 up to August 2012 was compromised due to lack of managerial continuity.

2.5 The Fostering Service achieved an Overall rating of 'Good' in its Ofsted inspection in November 2009. This was the first time during the services history under Telford & Wrekin Management that the service had been rated as 'Good' by Ofsted.

2.6 The recruitment of foster carers was affected by a number of challenges:

- the lack of a dedicated budget to advertise for foster carers
- very limited strategic direction and support (campaigning and media support)
- limited capacity to recruit, assess, train and support foster carers
- extremely limited capacity and systems to record, monitor and performance manage the recruitment of foster carers.

### **3. Summary of our Foster carer workforce and Recruitment activity - what we have learnt over the past 18 months.**

#### **3.1 Profile of our Foster carers as at 30.11.2012**

- Telford & Wrekin has **88** Mainstream Foster carers and **26** Kinship foster carers approved on its register. A total number of **114**.
- The majority **81%** of our internal foster carers reside within the Telford & Wrekin Area
- **19%** of our internal foster carers reside outside the Telford area. However, the majority of these carers **15%** live in the wider Shropshire area and **4%** live outside the wider Shropshire area.
- **82%** percentage of our foster carers are aged between 20 – 59 age range and **18%** of carers are aged 60+
- Telford & Wrekin have **above** the national average number of foster carers in the following age groups 30-39 and 40-49.
- Many of our carers who are in the 60+ age group are Connected person's carers (grandparents) not mainstream foster carers.
- **58%** of our foster carers are women and **42%** men.
- **59%** of our fostering households are Married; **28%** single; **12%** co-habiting couples; **1%** same sex relationship
- **4%** of our Fostering households are from black and minority ethnic groups.
- The average length of time spent fostering for our current approved foster carers is **4.7 years** and for those who have retired recently is **5.8 years**.
- Foster carer resignations : 13 approved foster carers resigned during 2011/12: it is significant to note that of those 13, 4 were mainstream carers, 3 Kinship carers and 6 support carers: None of our foster carers resigned in order to move to work for another local authority or independent fostering agency. The main reasons for resigning were due to deciding to retire: the foster carer obtaining a Special Guardianship Order, or the child placed with them became 18 and other personal circumstances affecting the foster carers ability to continue to foster.

- So far this year 2012/13 there have been 13 resignations : those resignations relate to children returning home( Connected person’s carer), Special Guardianship Orders being granted, children becoming 18.
- Despite the number of resignations the number of placements with mainstream carers increased by 18 children between November 2011 and November 2012. See table below.

Date	Number of CIC	CIC placed with internal foster carers	% placed with internal foster carers	CIC placed with external foster carers	% placed with external foster carers	CIC placed with F&F	% placed with F&F
30.11.11	300	96	32%	88	29.3%	47	15.7%
30.11.12	321	114	35.5%	95	29.6%	41	12.8%

### 3.2 Recruitment activity 2011/12

- Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 30 November 2012 the fostering service has received 92 inquiries and made 45 follow up visits to households this has generated 19 assessments of aspiring foster carers.
- National research on the recruitment of foster carers indicates that only **20%** of inquiries **1 in 5** result in approved foster carers- we are therefore not out of step with national statistics on the recruitment of foster carers.
- Of the 19 positive applications 15 will be presented to foster panel with a recommendation for approval by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 and a further 4 in April 2013.
- We have increased our activity to attract foster carers and have a weekly presence in the Town Centre shopping arena, attendance at local community events, and increased publicity through a range of media.
- We are clear from statistical data on the types of activities which generate more inquiries such as our website, newspaper ads, and our own foster carers assisting in generating interest amongst their family and friends.
- We have a robust plan for 2013/14- which includes the inclusion of our own foster carers in promotional recruitment events, targeting of specific foster carers to meet specific children’s needs; the introduction of emergency foster carer scheme, targeting prospective carers for teenagers, sibling groups, sole placements and mother and baby.

### 4. Conclusion

- Following an increase in managerial capacity through the safeguarding restructure process we are able to focus more effectively on the recruitment, assessment and ongoing support and training of foster carers
- There is a fostering recruitment strategy, supported by a budget and the Corporate Communications Team and an Intern.
- Due to improvements in the service our use of internal carers has increased.
- We are very successful at recruiting for children under 10; we are looking at exploring the development of a contract carer to concentrate on recruiting some carers for teenagers.

However, it must be acknowledged that our competitors in the independent sector also have challenges in recruitment for that age group.

- External children's improvement board money has been used to commission an expert in fostering to undertake a critical review of the service to see if there is anything else we can do to improve further.