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Purpose: For Noting

Committee report

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| Committee | POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES |
| Date | 28 NOVEMBER 2019 |
| Title | ISLE OF WIGHT FOSTERING PROGRESS 2012 - 2019 |
| Report of | DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report gives an overview of activity within the Isle of Wight Fostering Service since the Hampshire partnership commenced in 2012.

BACKGROUND

2. Isle of Wight (ISLE OF WIGHT) Children's Services saw a 33 per cent increase in their looked after children population in the six months following the inadequate Ofsted inspection in November 2012 from 150 to 200. In short this was because children who should have been in care had been left at risk in the community, and rightly, under the new partnership with Hampshire, these issues began to be addressed.
3. However, the number of in-house foster carers remained static leading to a 5 per cent increase in the numbers of young people needing to be placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCYs) both on and off the island. This approach did not deliver the best outcomes for young people, offering no choice of placement and often placing them away from home with the resultant isolation and barriers that being placed on the mainland incurs. In addition, the financial cost to the local authority was an additional £31,348 per placement, per annum.
4. The main recruitment strategy for the Isle of Wight in 2012 centred around 'Fostering Fortnight'. This had minimal success as a one-off event and did not generate the enquiries required to meet the approval conversion; in 2012, 20 enquiries generated five approvals for new foster carers.

5. The known issues experienced within the Isle of Wight Council at the time led to inconsistent support to carers and an overall low morale amongst the foster carer network, with ISLE OF WIGHT carers stating that they would not recommend fostering for the ISLE OF WIGHT Council to other people. Therefore, there was an urgent need to address both the recruitment and the retention of foster carers.
6. These issues were addressed through the improvement plan and the restructure of Children's Services which have established clear expectations and processes around the placement of children, information that needs to be provided to carers and placement planning meetings, which share information and support the carer in their role. In addition, the fostering service conducted a consultation on moving the payment of Isle of Wight foster carer allowances in line with Hampshire County Council carers (completed April 2014); designed a training pathway for ISLE OF WIGHT carers; updated the foster carer handbook to provide information that is clear and accessible; and moved to focused supervision sessions with foster carers which values their skills and experiences.
7. The team structure and budget were identified in 2013 as barriers to any recruitment success. Recruitment was part of the fostering team functions, with staff setting up recruitment stands, advertising on IOW radio, in various county publications and setting up a website. However, this was without dedicated staff or admin time and therefore these tasks were not prioritised over supporting foster carers and assessments. The marketing budget was small at £4,000 and was subsequently increased to £20,000.
8. In addition, a capital "invest to save" business case was agreed by ISLE OF WIGHT Council to increase the number of in-house foster carers by 50% over a two-year period by 2014-15. It was proposed that this increase in recruitment and retention on the island would result in a 50% reduction in numbers of young people being placed with Independent Fostering Agencies during the same two-year period. The aim was to increase placement choice and stability for Isle of Wight children.
9. A budget of £56,000 was approved and Prepare to Foster, a specialist fostering agency, was commissioned to market, recruit, assess and take to panel twenty foster carers over a 12-month period. This was on a payment by results basis at a cost of £2,800 per approval and commenced on 25 July 2013. This approach was unfortunately not successful as it did not convert any foster carers and the contract with the agency was not renewed.
10. Since 2015, the marketing budget has been set at £20,000. A further £40,000 was added over two years to enhance the marketing and recruitment campaign. The financial investment has led to rebranding and promotion of fostering in several formats including differing media; radio, paper, magazines, both on and off island. Competition on the Island is significant from INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCYS and other local authorities, with Portsmouth City Council targeting the island for their recruitment campaign in 2016.

11. In 2016, a further incentive for potential applicants or existing Foster Carers was introduced through a transparent allowance structure. This structure consists of two levels - an increase of £100 to the base rate for all Foster Carers which raised the allowance to the equivalent of other Local Authorities' level 2 payments; and the second level is the Impact Carer rate of £500 which is equivalent to or above the allowance provided by INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCYs and other Local Authority level 3 Foster Carers. This was put in place to recognise the skills, knowledge and abilities of the island's most experienced and able Foster Carers.

Approval activity

12. The Isle of Wight Council has seen a gradual increase in interest in fostering for the Council. This interest has translated into an increase in the assessment and registration of foster carers as can be seen below. The recruitment of only one foster carer household for 2015/16 resulted from the outsourcing to Prepare to Foster as described in section one with the company only recruiting one household.
13. There has been a dip in approvals in 2018/19 although at the end of the financial year, there were four households still in assessment and expected to progress to panel soon taking the number nearer 11 and more on a par with the previous year. This dip is comparative to the national picture where it is reported that the number of approved fostering households continues to decrease steadily and conversion rates across the UK of enquiries to applications have also seen a decrease of one per cent(Ofsted 2019).

| Year | Number of approvals |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| 2013/2014 | 8 |
| 2014/2015 | 7 |
| 2015/2016 | 1 |
| 2016/2017 | 14 |
| 2017/2018 | 14 |
| 2018/2019 | 7 |

Recruitment Strategy 2019/20

14. The Fostering Service's marketing strategy for 2019/20 aims to recruit 20 carers to reduce the reliance on more costly Independent Fostering Agencies (INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCYs). To date, we approved one household and have four in assessment. To continue to be effective, the campaign needs to be focused and dynamic to constantly engage with potential applicants and promote the benefits of fostering local children for the Council. Hampshire and the island marketing officers meet regularly to share intelligence about enquiries and work in partnership for the benefit of each Council.

15. Our marketing budget has been increased to £60,000 which has allowed us to refresh our brand and subsequently promote fostering in several formats: differing media; radio; paper; magazines, both on and off island. We have a stronger focus on increasing our digital presence and using social media platforms. This increase in investment has enabled the appointment of a Marketing Officer who, in partnership with Hampshire and Isle of Wight communications team, has driven forward the marketing strategy.
16. Marketing events are targeted to ensure that islanders are present (rather than visitors) and the team is undertaking many events across the island. To be responsive to the need to push harder to reach our 20 household target, smaller events in local areas are being targeted, including school/village fetes, to reduce competition that would be experienced at larger events and to avoid tourists. There are some larger events planned; however, they have been considered carefully to concentrate on family events that local people are likely to attend.
17. Our new collateral is engaging and attractive and ensures that the Isle of Wight Fostering name will become recognisable (see Appendix). Event attendance is also leading to requests to attend other events which is positive for ensuring visibility across the island.
18. Following each marketing event there has been a raised interest in the Isle of Wight Fostering Team's Council website. The website has been updated and was relaunched in November 2018 to coincide with our rebranding. An increased social media presence and working with local press has enabled us to continue to build on our successes. We will also ensure that our continued efforts with partners are producing an unrelenting SMART recruitment campaign.
19. We now have 3 years of statistics to provide a better understanding of the source of enquiries showing those that are no longer effective, allowing us to directly influence the shape of the marketing and recruitment drive in 2019/20.
20. Based upon the figures, the number of enquiries generated through events has declined since 2016, despite remaining one of the highest performing leads of 2018/19.
21. Internet and Facebook leads significantly improved from 2016 to 2018. The department had allocated a large percentage of last year's budget to digital marketing; however, due to a delay in implementing this strategy fully due to recruiting to the marketing officer post, to date there is minimal improvement in the number of initial enquiries from this source.
22. Word of mouth is a strong asset on the island and will be pushed harder this year; 93% of consumers state that reviews and recommendations impact their decision to interact with a brand.

Breakdown of Marketing Performance

| Lead generation | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 16/17 to 18/19 Cumulative |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|------------------------------|
| Internet | 10 | 17 | 18 | 45 |
| Word of mouth | 12 | 15 | 6 | 33 |
| Radio | 4 | 8 | 6 | 18 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Facebook | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| Events and drop-ins | 25 | 11 | 12 | 48 |
| Print media | 5 | 3 | 1 | 9 |
| Posters and flyers | 4 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Outdoor/ Large format adverts | 0 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY | 2 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| LA transfer | 0 | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| Unknown / back door enquiry | 51 | 8 | 25 | 84 |
| Grand Total | 114 | 77 | 80 | 271 |

Retention

23. The retention of foster carers is crucial for the service to continue to be successful and ensure outcomes for children remain positive. Various retention initiatives have been in place over the last 3 years and continue:
- Transparent and increased allowance structure
 - Skill level progression
 - Increased learning and development opportunities for foster carers including e-learning and access to Research in Practice
 - Foster care training pathway
 - Events for children in care, foster carers and birth children
 - Increased support via Lunch and Learn events
 - Q&A sessions with the Service Manager/Team Manager
 - Involvement of foster carers in strategic initiatives and development of policy and procedures
 - Foster carers' involvement in recruitment of staff
 - Foster carers' involvement in training for staff and prospective foster carers
 - Experienced foster carers mentoring newly approved foster carers
 - 1:1 consultation with educational psychologists
24. In 2018, the buddying system was reported to be beneficial with 64% of respondents from a recent carers' survey reporting they felt the support was good or excellent. Carers were also very positive around the support they received from each other.
25. In this survey one area where the carers raised concern was around financial support with 81% of respondents judging this to be 'okay' or 'poor'. A review of the allowances and the Impact Carer scheme has now been completed and concluded that the Impact Carers scheme is delivering the intended outcome in relation to recruitment and cost savings/avoidance. The 2.1% increase of allowances from 2019 will ensure the Isle of Wight Council remains competitive and we continue to retain our experienced carers.

Training and development

26. The Fostering Team and its foster carers continue to provide a high level of care and promote the health, welfare and safety of children and young people.

27. In line with statutory regulations and guidance, foster carers receive formal supervision a minimum of every six weeks from qualified workers. More intensive support when foster carers require it is also provided. They have access to a wide range of learning and development opportunities managed by workforce development and over the last year have been able to access:
- ‘Cool Calm and Connected’ – training to diffuse difficult situations
 - ‘Access to education psychologist’ (therapeutic intervention)
 - Fostering changes
 - Overview of policy and procedures
28. Foster carers also have access to specific peer learning support groups
- Connected Carers group
 - Play and Stay
 - Men that Foster group
29. These training and development opportunities enable carers to develop their understanding and skills in supporting children and young people and promoting positive outcomes for them.
30. The foster carer survey completed March 2018, identified 86% of respondents felt the range of face to face training offered was good or excellent and 71% judged the quality of the training to be good or excellent.
31. A carer said:
“Fostering changes has helped me to understand the child's behaviours and reasons. These courses are beneficial to child and carer”.

OFSTED 2018 noted:

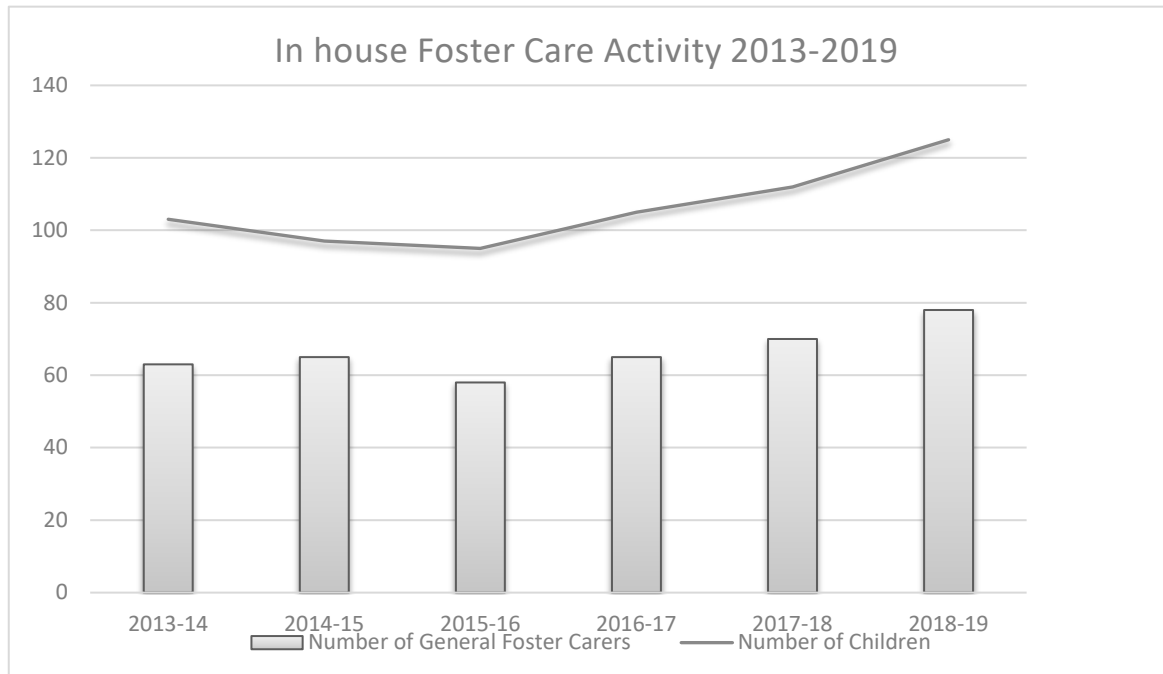
32. “The training and approval of foster carers are effective. The fostering panel carries out its core duties diligently and makes timely and appropriate recommendations. The information that is provided to the panel is of a good standard. Foster carers say that they feel part of the professional network and that their views are valued and used to influence children’s plans. They are integral to the team around each child, and this is a mutually supportive arrangement”.
33. The e-learning package introduced early in 2018 is now utilised by carers, this enables foster carers to undertake training in their own homes and at their own pace. Carers also have access to Research in Practice, an online resource supporting evidence-based practice for children and families. Feedback from carers, from the carers survey 2018, suggests this has been well received with 84% of respondents felt the range of courses on offer were good or excellent and 79% judge the quality to be good or excellent.

Fostering Households 2019

34. The Isle of Wight Council currently has 101 registered foster carers (including staying put and supported lodgings and connected carers being assessed with children in placement) households who are supervised by the Fostering Team and is the highest number of general foster carers the Island has ever had. This is a 6.3% increase from the previous year.
35. These households can be broken down into their different registrations:

| Registration | March 2019 |
|---|------------|
| General foster carer | 52 |
| Connected foster carer | 33 |
| Supported Lodgings | 4 |
| Family Link | 1 |
| Connected carer being assessed Child in Placement | 8 |
| Staying Put | 3 |
| Total | 101 |

36. As can be seen in the chart below, on 31 March 2019 125 children were placed with 78 in house foster placements, an increase of over 11% since March 2018 and the highest over the 7 years previous to this, demonstrating that fostering placements are being optimised.



37. Where appropriate, young people remain living with their foster carers after the age of 18 years; this is known as ‘Staying Put’ and seeks to extend the young person’s placement in a way that allows them to progress to more independent living at a time and pace that is based both on their assessed needs, as detailed within their Pathway Plan, and in accordance with their wishes and feelings. 14 Staying Put young people aged 18 years and over remain in placement with their foster carer; this is an increase of 11 (366.6%) from the previous year.

Deregistration of foster carers 2018/2019

38. Over the period of 2018/19 there have been 18 carers who have been deregistered comprising of 8 connected carers and 10 general carers.

39. The reasons for these were:

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Retired | 2 |
| Resigned | 5 |
| Passed Away | 1 |
| SGO granted | 5 |
| Transferred to Staying Put only | 1 |
| Termination following concerns | 1 |
| Change of personal circumstances | 3 |
| Total | 18 |

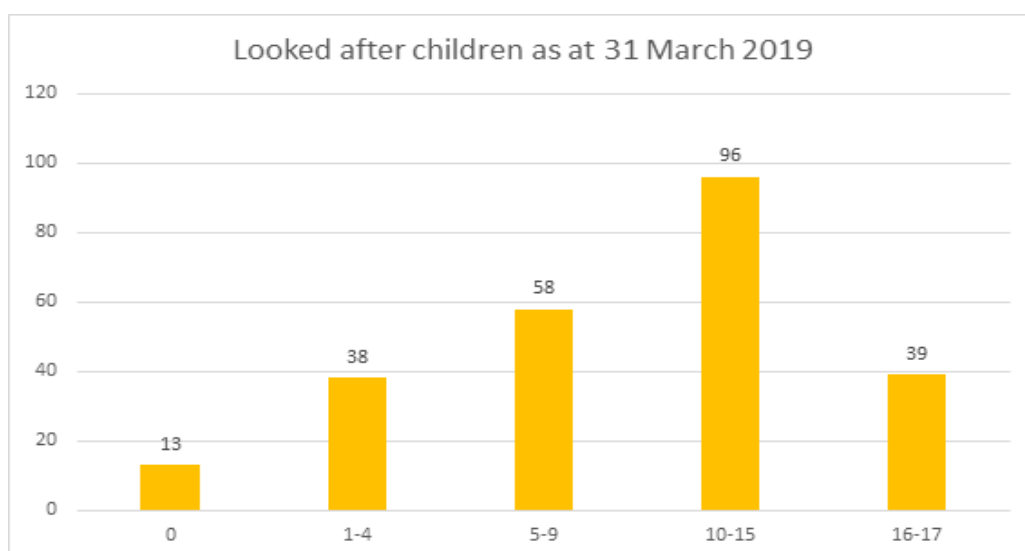
40. 27% of de-registrations occurred due to long term permanency being offered by our foster carers being granted an SGO which is very positive.
41. In 2018/19 the service received feedback from 5 carers; there has been no one, significant reason identified from these consultations. Those that retired had enjoyed their time fostering for the Isle of Wight Council; one carer has continued to care for their young adult under the Shared Lives scheme. All carers are offered the opportunity to meet with the team manager or assistant team manager or to provide feedback either verbally or via a questionnaire to ensure continuous learning from their experiences and to contribute to the development of the service.

Numbers and ages of Looked After children

42. At year end 2018/19 the Council had 244 children accommodated in their care in a range of accommodation. The numbers in each age group remains consistent with previous years.
43. 125 children were placed with in house foster placements and there were 49 children in INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY placements, many of them are sibling groups and older teenagers with more complex needs. This is representative of the national picture with INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCYS reporting a higher number of disabled children in their placements (State of the Nation Foster Care Report 2019) and the Foster Care in England Review (2018) showing that Independent Fostering Agencies are caring for more challenging children. The reasons for this appear to include Independent Fostering Agency carers having larger households, higher fee levels and more

specialist training.

44. The table below shows that the majority of placements are required for children aged 10-15 + and sibling groups. This will continue to be the focus for recruitment over 2019/20.



45. The Isle of Wight Council is currently responsible for 8 unaccompanied asylum seeker children who are currently looked after by the Isle of Wight Council, including three young people that are now open to the Care Leaver's team. This is an increase of one compared to last year. Some initial discussion has been undertaken with current registered foster carers and local community groups who would like to support the Council in this work and this will be developed further. Our marketing campaigns will also reflect this need.

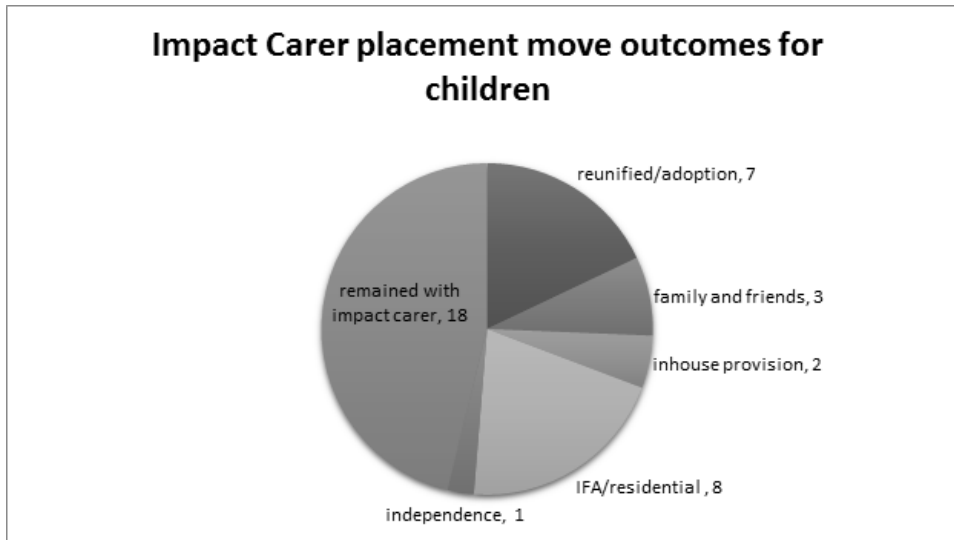
No of Children

Ages of Children

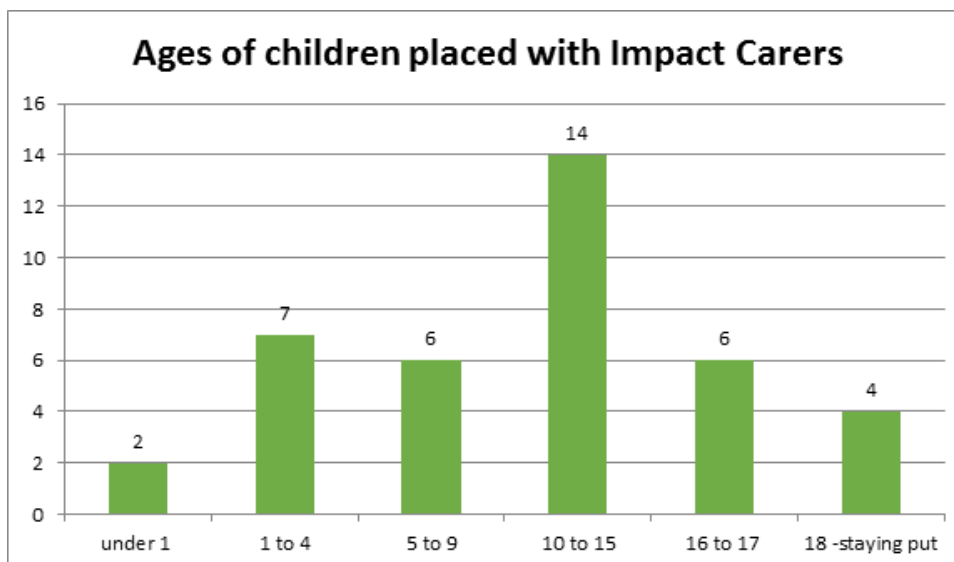
Impact Carer Scheme and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Placements

46. Since approval in 2016, the Impact Carer scheme has seen a higher level of skilled professional applicants show an interest in fostering. The financial incentive of £510 per child per week often means that skilled professionals are able to see fostering as a positive alternative to paid employment.
47. We continue to utilise our Impact Carers and since March 2018 Impact Carers have offered placements to 39 children, 18 of these children remain in placement. seven (18 per cent) have been either reunified with their families or adopted, three (eight per cent) have been placed with connected carers following assessment, two (five per cent) have moved to in house provision, eight (21 per cent) of children have moved to Independent Fostering Agency or residential due to their high complex needs or to enable careful planning.

48.



and four children are now Staying Put. This stability and continuity of carer will promote their life changes.



49. We currently have 10 approved Impact Carers, a decrease of one from the previous year. They are currently caring for 18 children and providing Staying Put to four young people. Two further carers are currently preparing their portfolio for 2019/20.
50. Two Impact Carers can provide parent and child placements which can save the department around £700 per week per placement compared with other providers; one of these also provides short term placement part of the year (Oct – Mar) which is invaluable to stabilising children or moving them on to more suitable placements in a planned way.
51. It is also worth noting that two of the Impact Carers have transferred from an Independent Fostering Agency which has resulted in further savings for the local authority. An audit and analysis undertaken in 2018/19 indicated that the Impact Carer scheme remains attractive and a competitive offer to carers and that the transparent allowances have had a positive impact on recruitment and retention of our foster carers.

52. The 2019/20 marketing strategy aims to ensure we recruit carers specifically for these groups with key targeting and raising awareness of fostering within the local community. We continue to look to increase our recruitment to bring back young people from Independent Fostering Agency placements and work to support reunification.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

53. Isle of Wight Corporate Plan 2019-2022 – this report demonstrates the service’s alignment to the IOW core values and the Children’s Services’ priority to ‘grow the number of foster carers and adoptive parents on the Isle of Wight’.
54. Children and Young People’s Plan 2017-2020 – this report also evidences alignment with the outcomes of: Children, young people and families enjoy the best possible mental, emotional and physical health; children, young people and families feel safe and behave safely; and children and young people have high aspirations and are able to achieve their full potential.

CONSULTATION

55. There has been no requirement for formal consultation. Foster carers have been involved in the development of the service throughout the time of this report.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

56. The financial impact of not delivering the strategy is that the pressure on independent fostering placements will continue. The current average for 2019/20 is 52 placements.

RISK MANAGEMENT

57. The risk of not achieving the identified growth of in house foster carers is that the reliance on independent fostering providers and non-county placements will be sustained or increased with the resulting budget pressures. On the Isle of Wight our average costs are £18,000 for a regular foster carer and £27,000 for an impact (more experienced in-house) foster carer and £47,000 for an Independent Agency foster carer.
58. This is a nationwide challenge, but the Isle of Wight has additional pressures with the island population being one of the oldest in England, with 27 per cent over the age of 65 years. This reduces the proportion of the population who fit within the target audience for fostering and the seasonality of work adds an additional challenge. Conversely, with unemployment rates being higher, fostering can be a positive choice for people who are available to commit time to children.

CONCLUSION

59. Current recruitment has allowed the foster carer cohort to remain consistent; replacing those that retire or choose to resign. The numbers that are now being recruited and assessed will increase capacity further to provide greater savings to the Local Authority and provide more accurate matching of placements. However, to continue to be effective, the campaign and marketing strategy needs to continue to be focused and dynamic to constantly engage with potential applicants and promote the benefits of fostering local children for the Council.
60. The Marketing Officer is now in post and, in partnership with Hampshire and Isle of Wight communications teams, is effectively driving forward the marketing strategy for 2019/20. The rebranding is ensuring that Isle of Wight Fostering is visible and has an identity that is recognisable. There is a busy programme of events planned to achieve an increase in enquirers and achieve targets set.
61. The Impact Carer scheme continues to be positive particularly on placement stability and producing positive outcomes for some children; 25 per cent of young people following being placed with an Impact Carer, have found permanency either living back with parents, family members or adoption. We will continue to utilise these placements and ensure that the right children are being placed with highly skilled carers, ensuring that placements are being optimised.

RECOMMENDATION

62. Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

[Appendix 1](#): ISLE OF WIGHT Fostering Leaflet

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