



PAPER B

Purpose: For update

Committee report

Committee	POLICY AND SCRUTINY FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES MEETING
Date	29 JUNE 2017
Title	FOSTERING REPORT
Report of	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides Committee with an update on the Isle of Wight Fostering Team in line with fostering services statutory regulations and guidance.

In January 2017, the management of the Isle of Wight Council fostering agency was transferred to Hampshire County Council County Services remit following the redundancy of the previous Service Manager. Overall responsibility now sits under Amber James, Interim Head of County Services, with Sarah Stewart as the County Service Manager for Integrated Placements who came into post in March 2017.

The Team achieved good outcomes within 2016 in recruitment, successfully approving 14 new fostering households for the Island. The introduction of the new allowance structure agreed by the Council in May 2016 has placed the agency in a strong position within the market which is being borne out in the recruitment achieved over the last year. This success will be built upon in 2017-18.

BACKGROUND

The Isle of Wight Fostering Team received a peer inspection under the Ofsted Single Inspection Framework in March 2017. Feedback for the Fostering Team was positive:

"The team present as a strong and cohesive team. They have clearly worked hard on their improvement strategy since the previous peer inspection and staff present as proud of their service".

The focus on the recruitment strategy over the last year was observed by the peer inspection team and foster carers reported feeling well supported and valued. Areas for development has been highlighted and an action plan is now in place to address these; although of note there were no areas that were not already known and being worked upon within the service. These are highlighted later in this report.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Isle of Wight Fostering Team completes all tasks associated with fostering therefore each staff member takes part in recruitment events, completes both Form F (the assessment undertaken with fostering applicants who wish to foster children with no relationship to them) and Connected carer assessments (for those applicants who have a pre-existing relationship with the child), facilitates training and provides supervision to approved foster carers.

Since late 2014, the Isle of Wight Council has been developing their fostering marketing/recruitment strategy to increase the number of in house Foster Carers and reduce the use of expensive independent fostering agencies (IFAs).

Competition on the Island is significant from IFAs and other local authorities, with Portsmouth City Council targeting the island for their recruitment campaign in 2016. Presenting a professional image and being clearly visible through branding is critical to begin conversations with potential applicants.

The department has financially invested in the service allowing the team to rebrand and promote fostering in several formats including differing media; radio, paper, magazines, both on and off island.

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 statistics indicate that enquiries are generated from various marketing events held throughout the year. Word of mouth and events are currently identified as being the most effective forms of recruitment. This is now being collated to provide a better understanding of the source of enquiries to directly influence the shape of the marketing and recruitment drive in the future.

Initial enquiries generation source	Volume 2015/16	Volume 2016/17
Internet	15	10
IFA	3	2
Isle of Wight College	1	1
Radio	6	4
Word of mouth	29	12
County Press newspaper	6	5
The Heights	1	
The Beacon magazine	5	

Facebook	3	1
Price is Right	3	
Fostering fortnight	1	
Not recorded	3	14
Billboard/ferry	0	4
Other inc. transfer from other LA or IFA	0	17
Festivals/events	0	24
Moved to IOW	0	2

Following each marketing event there has been a raised interest in the Isle of Wight Fostering Team council website. The Fostering team has designed its own web page and this will be going live in 2017/18.

The Isle of Wight Council has seen a gradual increase in interest in fostering. This interest has translated into a significant increase in the assessment and registration of Foster Carers from 1 approved in 2015/16 to 14 in 2016/17, an increase in its foster care population of 12.2%.

Retention

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.

These being:

- Transparent and increased allowance structure
- Skill level progression
- Increased learning & development opportunities for foster carers
- Foster care training pathway
- Events for children in care, foster carers and birth children
- Increased support groups
- Involvement of foster carers in strategic initiatives
- 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 consultations with educational psychologists

Connected Carers

2.5FTE social workers have a focus on completing assessments of applicants who come forward, or are approached as part of care proceedings, to care for a child known to them. This area of work can be a challenge within the team as court dates are frequently at short notice.

In order to assist the child care teams and ensure that family members are a viable option, the Fostering Team, where possible, completes joint viability visits. This practice is now embedded and has been well received by the child care teams.

In 2017/2018 keep in touch meetings will be reintroduced with the child care teams to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to care planning within care proceedings.

Training and development

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.

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 and over the last year have been able to access:

- 'Cool Calm and Connected' – training to diffuse difficult situations.
- 'Sandstories' – how to prioritise Children's needs.
- Monthly access to education psychologist (therapeutic intervention)

In 2017/2018, an E learning training package for carers to undertake training in their own homes and at their own pace is being launched. They will all have access to Research in Practice, an online resource supporting evidence based practice for children and families.

These training and development opportunities enable carers to develop their understanding and skills in supporting children and young people and promote positive outcomes for them.

Fostering panel

The service has an established fostering panel which meets monthly. All panels have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members. The panel chair has significant knowledge and experience of fostering issues although is

due to step down in September 2017. An experienced fostering Panel chair will be recruited to ensure the panel continues to carry out its functions.

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is now undertaken by Sarah Stewart, Service Manager Integrated Placement Services having recently taken over this role from Amber James. The ADM's role is to consider the fostering panel's recommendation to make the final decision. The ADM is a nominated person within the fostering agency who has the legal responsibility to make an approval decision.

Statistics

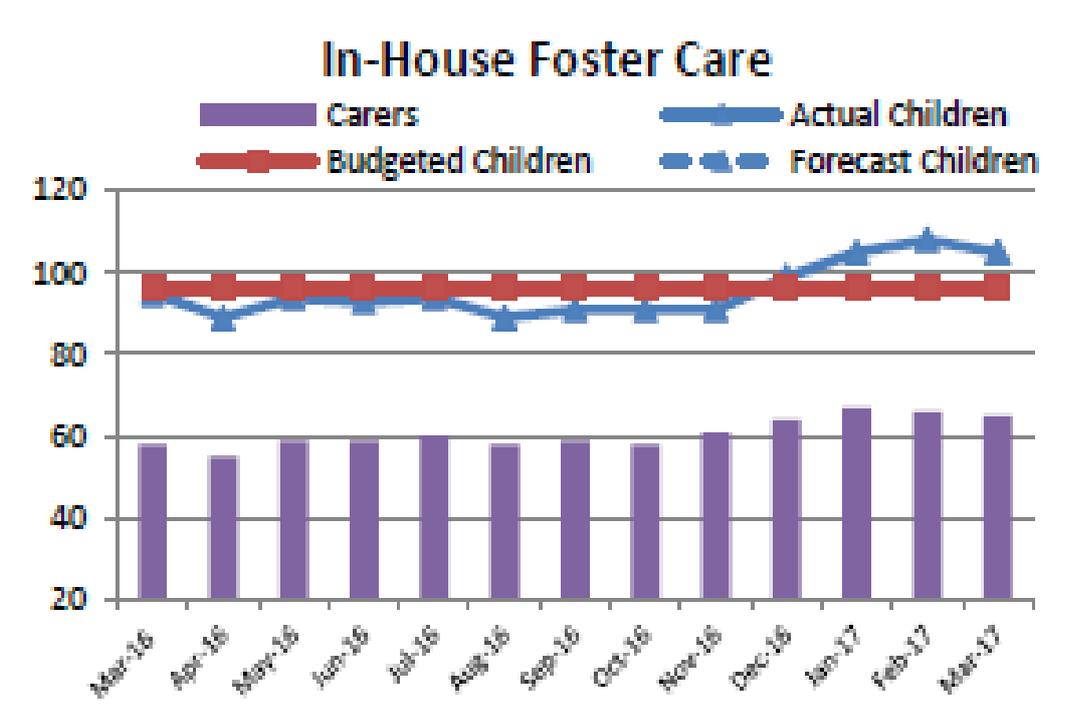
In House Fostering

The Isle of Wight Council currently has 96 Foster Carer households (in comparison to 82 reported in May 2016) who provide 121 Looked After Children and 5 supported lodgings placements. They are supervised by the Fostering Team. These households can be broken down into their different registrations identified in table 1:

Table 1

Registration	
General foster care	31
Supported Lodgings	4
Dual Registered	14
Foster to Adopt	0
Connected Carers	33
Connected Carers being assess with children in placement.	9
Family link	5
Total	96

The number of children placed with in house foster carers has increased over the last year as can be seen in the chart below:



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. 8 Staying Put young people aged 18 years older remain in placement with their foster carer.

Deregistration

Over the period of 2016/17 there have been 15 carers who have been deregistered. Reasons for these were:

Retired	2
Resigned	7 no clear reasons recorded
Granted Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	4
De registered	2 One carer for standard of care one for not taking a placement or able to be notified for the past 18 months
Total	15

In 2017/2018 feedback from carers will be gained at various stages of their fostering journey including when they resign to ensure continuous learning from their experiences and contribute to the development of the service.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers

The chart below shows the complaints received against Isle of Wight foster carers in this financial year. The Council has a Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers procedure as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Foster carers are prepared by the service to protect themselves against complaints through safer caring practice but to equally understand that complaints and allegations may well happen and how to respond if they do. They can still be upsetting and distressing for foster carers so it is imperative that the service responds promptly and efficiently wherever possible.

Complaints and allegations are graded level 1 to 3 according to the level of concern to support a proportionate response and engage the right people at the right time in the process. A concern (level 1), complaint (level 2) or allegation (level 3) is a formal or informal written or oral expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to the care provided to a child(ren) whilst the local authority exercises its functions under Part III of the Children Act 1989. This can relate to either a current or historical situation.

The definition of concern (level 1), complaint (level 2) and allegation (level 3) is outlined below:

Level 1 Concern: Issues related to day-to-day management:

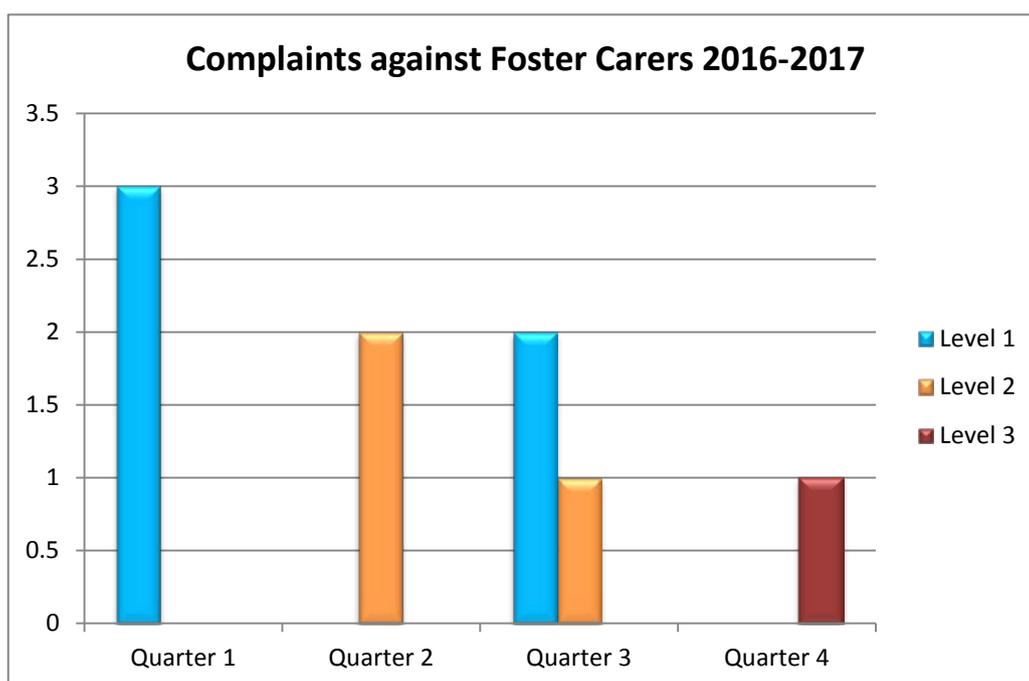
- For example having a child's hair cut without discussion with parents.
- Quality or nature of diet, clothing or routine care and low level discipline issues.
- An accumulation of extremely low level issues that have not met the threshold for the complaints and allegations procedure i.e. met the above threshold (2.2)

Level 2 Complaint: A formal or informal complaint is made relating to but not limited to:

- Foster carers parenting style and quality of care for example inappropriate discipline.
- Quality of working with other professionals/practitioners for example failure to adhere to the child's care plan.
- Lack of or breach of confidentiality / unsuitable practice with regard to families - for example being discourteous towards parents.
- An accumulation or worsening of 'one-off' or continuing low level concerns about day to day care

Level 3 Allegation: Whereby it is alleged that a foster carer has:

- Behaved in a way that has or may have harmed a child or young person for example, physical, emotional, sexual abuse, grooming or neglect.
- Committed a criminal offence against/related to a child or young person for example any of the above.
- Behaved in a way which indicates she/he is unsuitable to work with children or young people for example, but not limited to, viewed pornographic internet sites, consumed excessive alcohol whilst with a child or engaged in domestic violence.



Timeliness of complaints and allegations process:

Completed within 10 working days	15 working days	20 working days	30 working days	30+ days	Not recorded	Ongoing
	1	1		7		

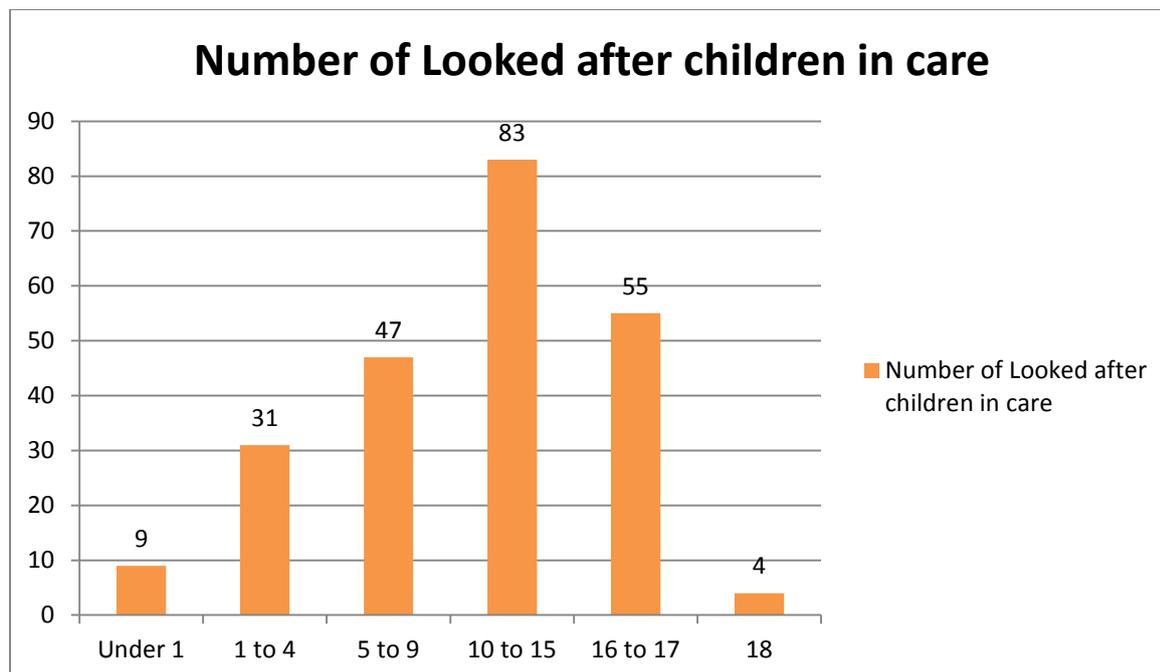
This is an area where the documentation and timeliness requires significant improvement, only 2 out of the 9 (22.2%) of the concerns raised were completed within the 29 day timescale.

Current practice is to record the information on a spreadsheet which is reliant on individual workers informing the lead social worker for this area. This results in human error, information and dates not being reported or easily found within the

system. The tab on swift is completed at the time of the allegation /concern however to date there is no report that is pulled from the system which provides instant information or easy management oversight to reduce drift.

In April 2017, Hampshire County Council and the Isle of Wight Council reviewed and released a new policy and protocol regarding the concerns, complaints and allegations against foster carer procedures and it is anticipated this will significantly improve the timeliness of the allegations process over the next year.

Numbers and ages of looked after children



Information obtained from the data team 3 April 2017

At year end 2016/17 the Council had 229 children accommodated in their care in a range of accommodation.

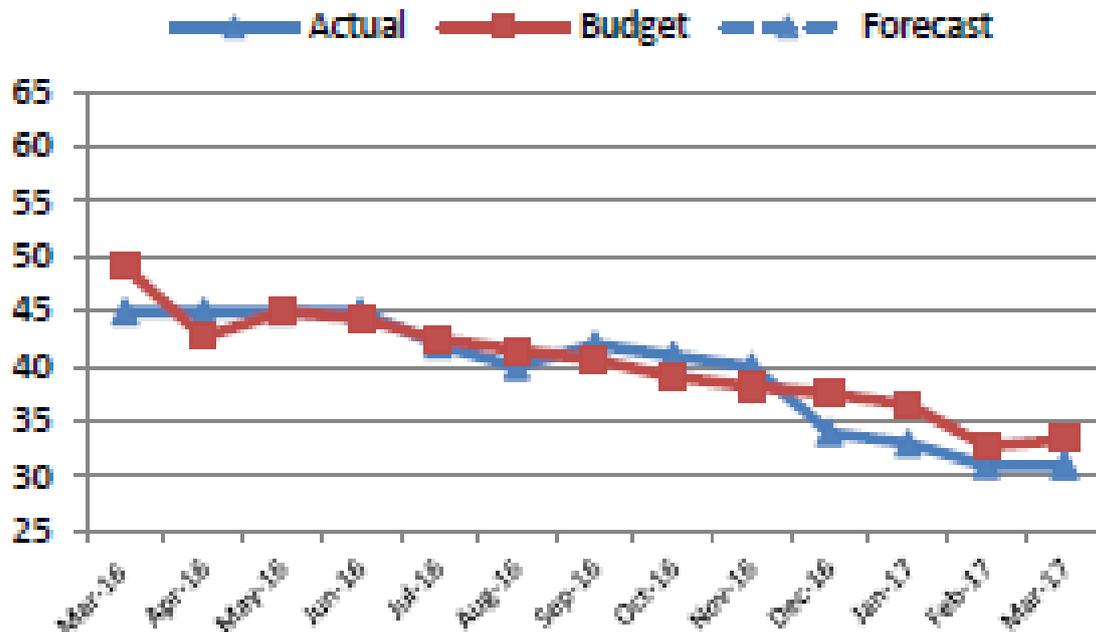
From the information above the majority of placements are required for children aged 10-17 and sibling groups. This will be the focus for recruitment over 2017/18.

Impact Carer Scheme & IFA Placements

In the last report it was the view of the Service Manager that 35 of the then 41 children placed within IFA placements could be placed with experienced in house carers if they could be recruited. The Impact Carer scheme approved by the Council last year has seen a higher level of skilled professional applicants show an interest in fostering. The financial incentive of £500 per child per week often means that skilled professionals are able to see fostering as a positive alternative career option.

The Isle of Wight Council currently has 31 young people placed in IFA placements both on and off island. This is a reduction of 10 placements since the last report to committee in May 2016 demonstrating that the in house strategy is having a positive impact on the care of the Island's young people.

External Foster Care



There are 9 Impact foster carers who provide accommodation and care for some of the Island's most challenging children who, without them, would potentially be placed in IFAs or Residential. 1 Impact foster carer transferred from an IFA having three island children in placement therefore making a financial saving for the department. 1 foster carer who transferred from a different local authority is waiting for Impact carer ratification.

A thorough analysis of the Impact Carer scheme will be undertaken within the team within the next three months to scrutinise the difference it is making to the quality of care young people receive and the financial position for the department. This was one area of recommendation also from the peer inspection.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

The Dispersal Scheme committed all local authorities to providing care to unaccompanied asylum seeking children equivalent to 0.07% of their child population. For the Isle of Wight Council this means a commitment to 18 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and this will be an additional focus for recruitment. 5 children are currently looked after by the Isle of Wight Council. These young people are all placed with IFAs in Croydon, Wembley, Luton and Leicester. Some initial discussion has been undertaken with local community groups who would like to support the Council in this work and this will be developed further.

Conclusion

The new marketing strategy and transparent allowance structure that was approved by the former Children's Committee in May 2016 has impacted positively on existing foster carers and the island's recruitment resulting in an increased in house cohort and provision of placements to children who would otherwise have been placed in IFA or residential provision. As a direct result the numbers of children being placed in this type of provision is reducing.

This level of 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 needs focus and dynamism to constantly engage with potential applicants and promote the benefits of fostering local children for the Council. Timeliness of assessments needs to be developed and was highlighted as a recommendation from the peer inspection.

The Impact Carer scheme now needs to be reviewed to ensure that the right children are being placed with highly skilled carers ensuring that placements are being optimised as well as finances.

In March 2017, the peer inspection also recommended that a more efficient transfer procedure is developed for carers who are approved by IFA or local authority agencies and want to join the Isle of Wight Council fostering agency. Competition is high and any process which ensures carers are easily able to transfer, where appropriate, is critical. This forms part of the action plan.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee are being asked to note the report and its contents.

Contact Point: Sarah Stewart, County Service Manager Integrated Placements
e-mail sarah.3.stewart@hants.gov.uk

STEVE CROCKER
Director of Children's Services

PAUL BRADING (CLLR)
Executive Lead Member Children's Services