



## PAPER F

Purpose: For update

# Committee report

Committee	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES MEETING</b>
Date	<b>7 JUNE 2018</b>
Title	<b>FOSTERING REPORT</b>
Report of	<b>DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>

---

### 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 Services remit. Overall responsibility sits with Sarah Stewart as the County Service Manager for Integrated Placements who came into post in March 2017 but is due to leave in July 2018. We are currently recruiting to this post.

The Team successfully recruited and approved 14 new fostering households for the Island within 2017/18, despite a reduction in the number of enquiries (32%) and initial home visits (13%) compared to 2016/2017. During the year we have increased the use of in house carers by 8% compared to March 2017, despite the reduced interest.

The Fostering Service has a marketing strategy for 2018/19 that aims to recruit 20 carers to reduce the reliance on more costly Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA), and to increase placement choice. To support this, we have had investment to enable the appointment of a Marketing Officer who, in partnership with Hampshire and the communications team, is driving forward the marketing strategy for 2018/19. This will include rebranding and strengthening our social media/ digital presence.

#### 1. BACKGROUND

1.1. 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”.*

- 1.2. A foster carer survey was completed in March 2018 and we received a not unreasonable 23% response rate.
- 1.3. All foster carers have a supervising social worker (SSW) to support, advise and guide them in every aspect of fostering. 91% of respondents judged the support they received from their supervising social worker was good or excellent and 82% of respondents were quite or very satisfied with the service overall.
- 1.4. A carer reported their experiences of the support from the service:

*“The team of Supervising Social Workers seem to be well co-ordinated and give good levels of support to me and other foster carers. Some of the training I have attended has been interesting and given new insightful ways to support young people as well as developing peer support amongst carers.”*

## 2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

- 2.1. 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.
- 2.2. Since late 2014, the Isle of Wight Council has been developing their fostering marketing/ recruitment strategy and has continued to maintain and begin to increase the number of In-house Foster Carers. The Isle of Wight Council has maintained approvals over the last 2 years, in comparison to the national picture where it is reported the number of approved fostering households continues to decrease steadily (National statistics, March 2018).
- 2.3. The previous marketing strategy and allowance structure that was approved by the former Children’s Committee in May 2016, and included the introduction of an Impact Carer Scheme to acknowledge carers with a higher level of skills, has impacted positively on recruiting and retaining existing experienced foster carers who otherwise may have transferred to other fostering agencies. The island’s Impact Carers are using skills and providing placements to children

who may otherwise have been placed with independent fostering agencies (IFA) or residential provision.

- 2.4. The department has financially invested in the service since 2015. The marketing budget, shared with the Adoption service, had been set at £20,000, with a further £40,000 added over two years to enhance the marketing and recruitment campaign.

However, competition on the Island is significant from IFAs and other local authorities, and the need to ensure we continue to remain competitive is essential. We have had continuing success although this has been at a local grass root level and we recognise we have to strengthen our media/ social media/ digital presence. Raising awareness, being clearly visible and presenting a professional image and being clearly visible through branding is critical to begin conversations with potential applicants.

- 2.5. The Fostering Service's marketing strategy for 2018/19 aims to recruit 20 carers to reduce the reliance on more costly Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). However, 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.
- 2.6. This year our marketing budget has been increased to £60,000 which has already allowed us to refresh our brand and subsequently promote fostering in several formats: differing media; radio; paper; magazines, both on and off island. We will 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 communications team, is driving forward the marketing strategy (see Appendix 1).
- 2.7. Following each marketing event there has been a raised interest in the Isle of Wight Fostering Team council website. The website has been updated and is in the process of being launched to coincide with our rebranding. An increased social media presence and working with local press is anticipated to enable us to continue to build on our successes. We will also ensure our continued efforts with partners are producing an unrelenting SMART recruitment campaign.
- 2.8. In 2017/18 our enquiries were generated from various marketing events held throughout the year. The IOW Council fostering and adoption services have not had a strong media presence so to date, word of mouth, Google and events have been identified as the most effective forms of recruitment. We now have 3 years of statistics to provide a better understanding of the source of enquiries

to directly influence the shape of the marketing and recruitment drive in the future.

<b>Initial enquiries generation source</b>	<b>Volume 2015/16</b>	<b>Volume 2016/17</b>	<b>Volume 2017/18</b>
Internet	15	10	17
IFA	3	2	4
Isle of Wight College	1	1	0
Radio	6	4	8
Word of mouth	29	12	15
County Press newspaper	6	5	3
The Heights	1	0	3
The Beacon magazine	5	0	0
Facebook	3	1	1
Price is Wight	3	0	0
Not recorded/stated	3	14	8
Billboard/ferry	0	4	0
Post/print room facing road	0	0	5
Other inc. previous carers	0	17	4
Festivals/events	1	24	8
Moved to IOW	0	2	1

The Isle of Wight Council has experienced a reduction in enquiries this year. Despite this we have continued to build on our recruitment success with a further 14 general carers approved in 2017/2018 compared with 14 in 2016/17 and 1 in 2015/16. The Fostering Team currently have 11 general carers undergoing Form F assessments and have received 3 applications in April 2018.

### 3. RETENTION

3.1. 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 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 consultations with educational psychologists

3.2. The mentoring 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.

3.3. In the recent 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 is underway to ensure the Isle of Wight Council remains competitive and we continue to retain our experienced carers.

#### 4. CONNECTED CARERS

4.1. 2.5 FTE social workers have a focus on completing assessments of applicants who come forward, or who 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.

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

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

4.4. The Fostering Service currently holds 10 connected carer assessments at various stages of assessment within the team.

#### 5. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1. 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.
- 5.2. 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
  - access to education psychologist (therapeutic intervention)
- 5.3. 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.
- 5.4. 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.
- 5.5. A carer said:

*“Fostering changes has helped me to understand the child's behaviours and reasons. These courses are beneficial to child and carer”.*
- 5.6. In 2017/2018, an eLearning training package for carers was launched to enable 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, 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.

## 6. FOSTERING PANEL

- 6.1. The service has an established fostering panel which meets monthly. All panels have been quorate which reflects the excellent commitment of the panel members.
- 6.2. Our previous experienced panel chair stepped down in January 2018. We have successfully recruited a very experienced fostering panel chair to ensure the panel seamlessly continues to carry out its functions and drive forward service improvements with well develop feedback on practice.

- 6.3. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is undertaken by Sarah Stewart, Service Manager, Integrated Placement Services, although this function will be passed to the new Service Manager once recruited. The ADM is a nominated person within the fostering agency who has the legal responsibility to make an approval decision. The ADM's role is to consider the fostering panel's recommendation to make the final decision.
- 6.4. Panel feedback from applicants is routinely sought; 97% of carers felt prepared for panel, suggesting their Supervising Social Workers had helped them to prepare. It is noted, 15% reported as feeling anxious but commented this was linked to nerves about sitting in front of a group of people and wanting a positive outcome. Positively, all carers felt welcomed, they had been given plenty of opportunities to share their views and be adequately heard by panel members.
- 6.5. Feedback is also obtained from panel members with some clear themes emerging which are in relation to quality of the reports, Children's Social Workers attending panel and ensuring the child's views and experiences are fully recorded. The fostering team have put in place measures to start addressing these such as ensuring that quality assurance processes are followed and any issues identified are rectified prior to compiling the panel packs and ensuring a report from the Children's Social Worker is provided if they are unable to attend.

## 7. STATISTICS

### 7.1. **In House Fostering**

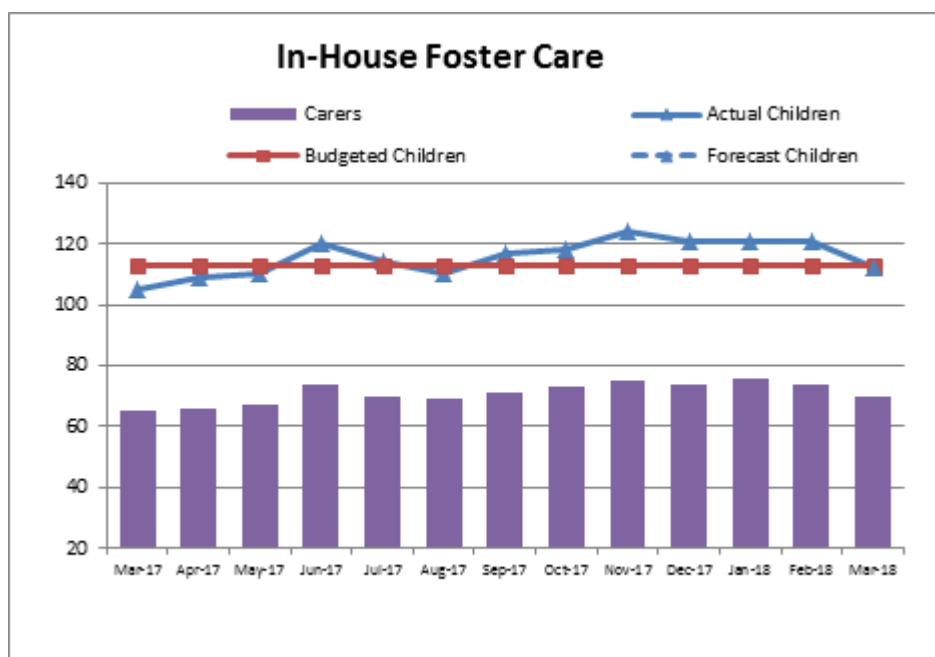
The Isle of Wight Council currently has 95 Foster Carer households who are supervised by the Fostering Team.

- 7.2. These households can be broken down into their different registrations identified in table 1:

Table 1

<b>Registration</b>	
General foster care	54
Supported Lodgings	4
Foster to Adopt	0
Connected Carers	30
Connected Carers being assessed with children in placement.	6
Family link	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>

7.3. As can be seen in the chart below on 31 March 2018, 112 children were placed with 70 in house foster placements, up 8% since March 2017.



7.4. There are currently 9 carers on hold for a variety of reasons including changes in personal circumstances, health and due to allegations. Carers on hold are closely monitored on a monthly basis.

7.5. 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. 3 Staying Put young people aged 18 years and over remain in placement with their foster carer; this however is a reduction of 5 (62%) compared to last year and requires further analysis to the reasons young people are not remaining with their carers post 18.

## 8. DEREGISTRATION

8.1. Over the period of 2017/18 there have been 21 carers who have been deregistered comprising of 12 connected carers, 3 family link, 3 supported lodgings and 3 general carers.



The reasons for these were:

Retired	4
Transferred to IFA (supported lodgings)	1
SGO granted	5
Reunification	1
Moved to independence	3
De registered following allegation	2
Change of personal circumstances	5
Total	21

- 8.2. In 2018/2019, feedback from carers will be gained at various stages of their fostering journey including when they resign. All carers will be offered the opportunity to meet with the team manager or assistant team manager or to provide feedback via a questionnaire to ensure continuous learning from their experiences and contribute to the development of the service.

## 9. COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS AGAINST FOSTER CARERS

- 9.1. The Council has a Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers procedure as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- 9.2. 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.
- 9.3. 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/children 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.
- 9.4. The definition of concern (level 1), complaint (level 2) and allegation (level 3) is outlined below:
- 9.4.1. 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)

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

- Foster carer's 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.

9.4.3. 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:**

<b>Completed within 10 working days</b>	<b>15 working days</b>	<b>20 working days</b>	<b>30 working days</b>	<b>30+ days</b>	<b>Not recorded</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
		2		3		3

9.5. There have been 8 allegations made and investigated at level 2 or 3 within the 2017/18 period - this is comparatively higher than previous years. However, 75% of all allegations have been made by children in care. This could suggest that children in care are more confident in voicing their views and opinions, having more confidence that they will be listened to and action will be taken.

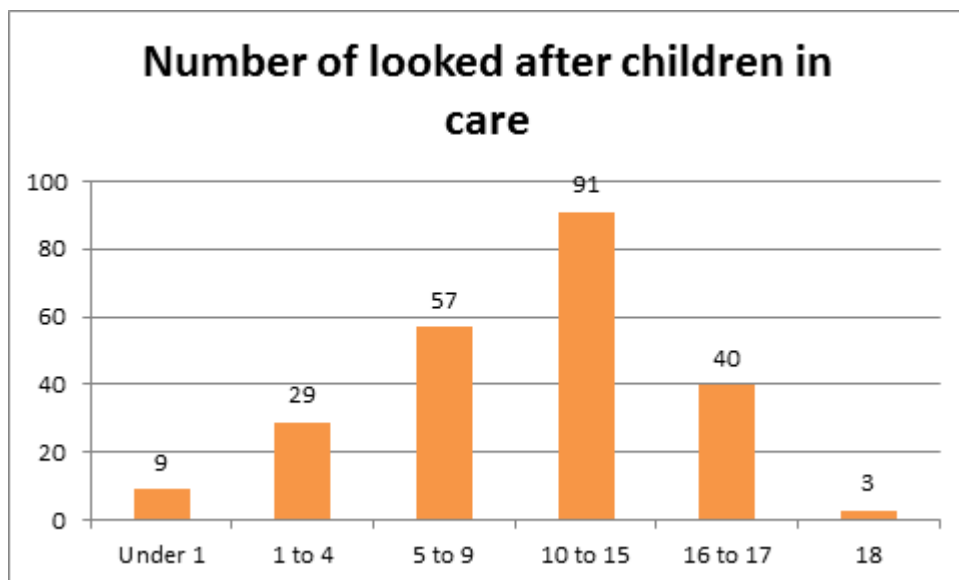
9.6. Only 2 out of the 5 (40%) of the concerns raised were completed within the 29 day timescale with a further 3 remaining ongoing due to active police investigations yet to be resolved. This remains an area of concern and has

been raised with Service Managers, who chair the strategy meetings, to ensure there is no drift in the conclusion of the strategy meeting.

9.7. The fostering service across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has a new allegation/ complaints policy; this policy has clear timescales and areas of responsibility, therefore will reduce drift. Further monitoring in the area will be undertaken in 2018/19 to ensure improvements are made.

9.8. Learning from complaints continues to be a focus; the fostering service, carers and young people have contributed to the recent development of a behaviour management policy due to be launched in May 2018 to ensure this provides clarity to carers on behaviour management.

#### 10. NUMBERS AND AGES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN



Information obtained from the data team as at 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2018)

10.1. At year end 2017/18 the Council had 226 children accommodated in their care in a range of accommodation.

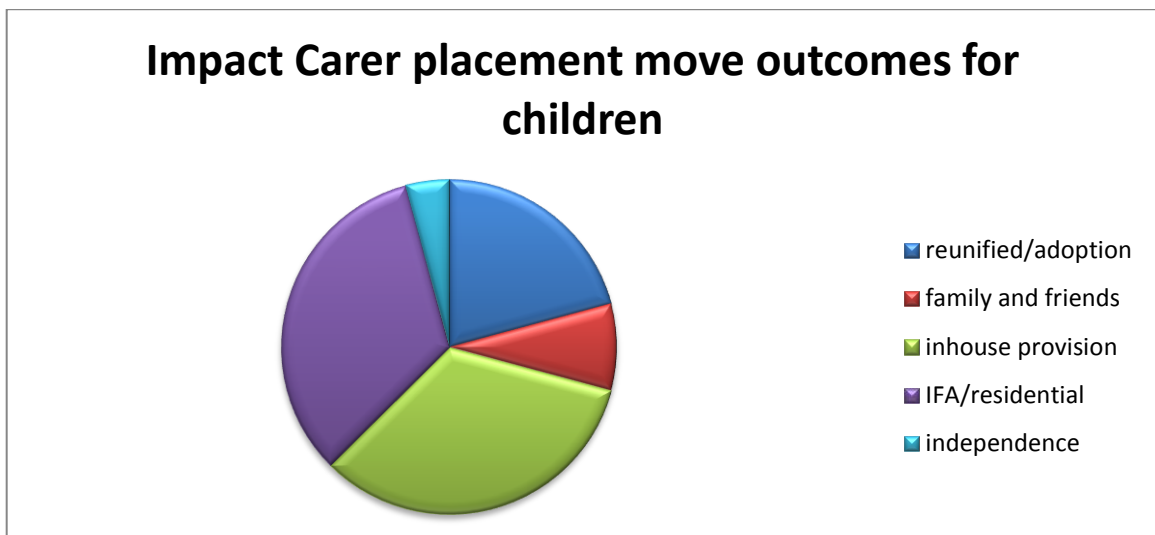
10.2. 112 children were placed with 70 in house foster placements and there were 48 children in IFA placements, many of them are sibling groups and older teenagers with more complex needs.

10.3. From the information above the majority of placements are required for children aged 10-15 + and sibling groups. This will be the focus for recruitment over 2018/19.

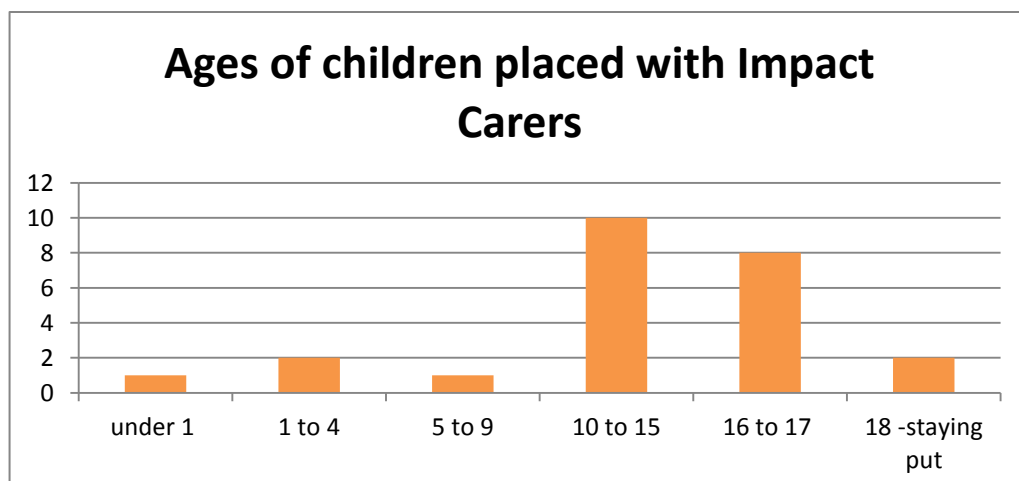
11. IMPACT CARER SCHEME & INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY (IFA) PLACEMENTS

11.1. The Impact Carer scheme was approved by the Council in 2016 and 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 option to working.

11.2. Since 2016, a further 29 placements had been made for 24 children (some children have returned to previous carers when their IFA/residential placements had broken down). 33% have been either reunified home, placed with connected carers following assessment or moved to independence, 33% have moved to in house provision and 33%, representing 8 children, have moved to IFA or residential due to their high complex needs or to enable careful planning.



11.3. We currently have 11 approved Impact Carers, an increase of 2 on the previous year. They are currently caring for 24 children and young people and providing Staying Put to 2 young people.

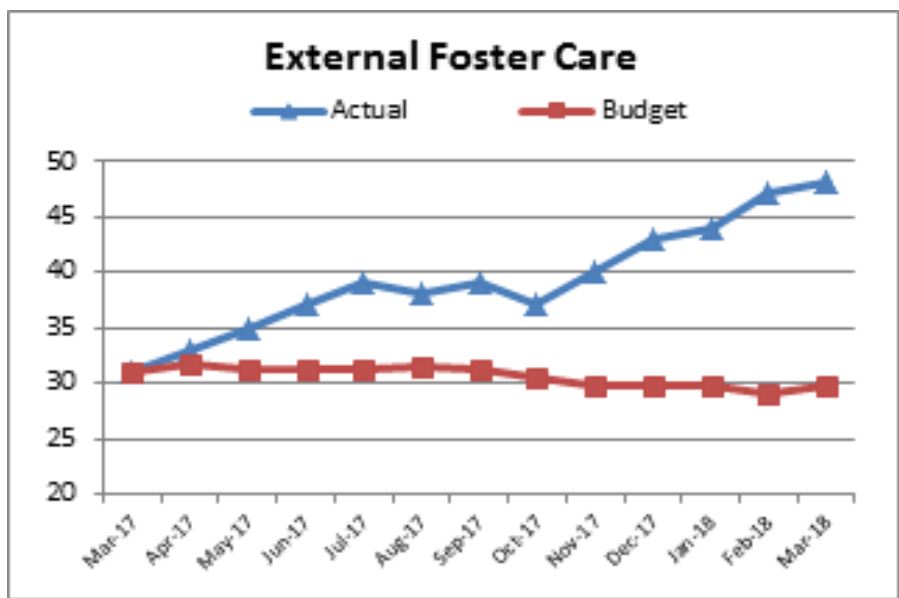


11.4. The profile of the children placed with Impact Carers is how the scheme was intended with a higher concentration of 10 to 15 year old plus. It is also worth noting that 40% (10) of the children placed with Impact Carers have been in placement 2 years or more and 2 children are Staying Put.

11.5. One Impact Carer currently provides a parent and child placement which can save the department around £700 per week compared with other providers, and another 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.

11.6. 32% (8) children stepped down from IFA or residential to an Impact carer. Further financial analysis is underway to fully understand the saving made. Another 2 young people were identified as requiring residential due to their needs but placed with an Impact Carer in an emergency, the carer worked hard in each of these cases to support a reunification home plan which was successful.

11.7. The Isle of Wight Council currently has 48 young people placed in IFA placements both on and off island; many of them are sibling groups and older teenagers with more complex needs. This is an increase of 17 placements since the last report to Committee in June 2017. In 2016/17, there was a higher proportion of Children Looked After (CLA) who were placed with parents or for adoption with no costs to the department. This number has reduced during the year, leading to a budget pressure with increased use of IFAs.



11.8. The 2018/19 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 would look to increase our recruitment to bring back a minimum 10 young people from IFA placements and work with the team to support reunification. The average cost of an IFA placement is around £800 per week and this would result in potential savings of £3,000 per week or £156K per year if placed with Impact carers.

## 12. UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)

- 12.1. 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.
- 12.2. children are currently Looked After by the Isle of Wight Council, an increase of 2 compared to last year. These young people are all placed with IFAs mainly in the London area. 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.

## 13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1. 2017/18 has seen a decrease in the number of enquiries although we have continued to maintain our good approval levels compared to a reported reduction nationally in the recruitment of carers.
- 13.2. 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.
- 13.3. However, to continue to be effective, the campaign and marketing strategy needs to be focussed and dynamic to constantly engage with potential applicants and promote the benefits of fostering local children for the Council.
- 13.4. The Marketing Officer is now in post and, in partnership with Hampshire and communications team, is driving forward the marketing strategy for 2018/19 including rebranding and strengthening our social media/ digital presence with a clear plan (see Appendix 1). All stakeholders will be working together to achieve the targets we set out. We also have a busy programme of events already planned to achieve an increase in enquirers and achieve targets set.
- 13.5. The Impact Carer scheme appears to be having an impact particularly on placement stability and producing positive outcomes for some children although

further work to ensure that the right children are being placed with highly skilled carers, ensuring that placements are being optimised as well as finances, is required.

RECOMMENDATION

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

14. APPENDIX

14.1. [Appendix 1 – Action plan for rebrand and launch](#)

Contact Point: Sarah Stewart, County Service Manager Integrated Placements,  
e-mail sarah.stewart3@hants.gov.uk

*STEVE CROCKER*  
*Director of Children's Services*

*PAUL BRADING (CLLR)*  
*Cabinet Member*