



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 17 April 2024 at 6.00 pm in Council Chamber, Third Floor, Southwater One, Telford, TF3 4JG

Present: Councillors J Jones (Chair), Z Hannington, A S Jhawar, K Tonks, J Urey and O Vickers.

In Attendance: K Burgess (Fostering, Adoption and Performance Service Delivery Manager), D Knibbs (Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support), P Starkey (Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)) D Thomas-White (Lead Lawyer: Children & Adults) and S Yarnall (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny))

Apologies: Councillors L Powers and L Parker
Co-Optees: S Fikeis and C Morgan

CYP24 Declarations of Interest

None.

CYP25 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CYP26 Recruitment in Fostering

The Committee received a presentation from the Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support and the Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance on the Council's approach to Foster Carer recruitment and retention.

The recruitment and retention of Foster Carers was a continued challenge for local authorities across the country and at the time of the meeting an estimated 7,200 foster families would be needed over the next 12 months. Since 2019, the number of mainstream local authority households had fallen by 11% and the number of kinship foster care households had increased by 21%.

Local authorities had recently experienced a reduction in approved Foster Carers, however the Council's Fostering Service had performed above most statistical neighbours in the number of fostering household applications completed and approved for 2022/23. At the time of the meeting, there were 173 approved foster care households and 183 children placed with carers. In the last year, the Council



had received 25 applications for prospective fostering households compared to neighbouring authorities such as Dudley and Walsall who had received a lower number of applications. Since April 2023, a total of 37 teenagers had come into care with 21 placed in internal fostering, 9 placed in external fostering and 7 in residential placements.

Members were informed that the key priorities for the Council in relation to its fostering service was to increase foster carer capacity by focusing on recruitment and retention to enable more Telford and Wrekin children who are looked after to stay local. The Council would also be working to maximise utilisation of capacity to prevent external and residential placements where possible and support its carers through development of skills and resilience.

As part of its recruitment and retention aims, Members were advised that the Council would continue its efforts to recruit the right carers, at the right time, in the right place to meet its sufficiency needs. The Council was also keen to deliver the right support for its foster carers through continuous coproduction and ensure that those foster carers who are recruited reflect the culture and diversity of cared for children. The Council had commenced its Foster Carer Sufficiency Strategy last year to exceed targets but also to manage current foster carers to avoid placement breakdowns and to continue to support children who have significant or additional needs.

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance informed Members that between April 2023 – March 2024 as part of its ongoing recruitment activity the Council had delivered 6 recruitment campaigns delivered via diverse mediums including paid search engine marketing, social media led generation and retargeting. The Council had also hosted 5 recruitment events alongside regular drop-in events and facilitated numerous advertising initiatives including a fostering flyer distributed to all borough households. The Foster Carer Fortnight and Annual Conference was also held to thank carers for their efforts and to enable the Fostering Team to consult the current cohort on how the service can further improve their experience as a foster carer.

In April 2024, the Council would be launching a new marketing campaign to increase awareness and available opportunities to become a foster carer with Telford Fostering, aiming to increase the annual number of applications and approved carers. Some of the key activities as part of the new marketing campaign will include advertising on Council assets such as electronic boards, radio advertisement and social media.

Members were advised that part of the Council's approach to retaining its foster carers was focused on providing continued support and development. The Foster Carer Fortnight is a forum that provides activities for children, celebrates carers and delivers regular learning and development sessions. A new provider had been commissioned to deliver specific training based on current needs of children that



carers required further support on such as complex childhood trauma and self-harm. The Fostering Service also delivered numerous support groups for carers including the fostering circle, walk and talks and men who foster.

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance advised that the Fostering Service had co-produced a new foster carer support model with carers to create informal networks with peers which will be distributed across 13 localities with support from fostering social workers. In September 2023, a No Detriment Policy was introduced to support delivery of kinship strategy recommendations which has seen an increase in carers wanting to take our special guardianship orders (SGOs) with a total of 33 SGOs in the last year.

Members were also informed that an upgraded learning and development offer would be launched for 2024/25 which would include topical courses such as online safety and occupational therapy. The Fostering Service would also be undertaking Dyadic Development Psychotherapy training to enable them to support carers with providing care for children with developmental trauma.

Looking ahead for 2024/25, the Fostering Service would be aiming to exceed recruitment targets and increase placement choice for children and young people to enable them to enter homes that are best aligned to their needs. The service would also be working to increase the number of children in placed care with family and friends and boost its support offer for SGO carers to increase the number of children and young people under existing SGOs.

Following the presentation, Members posed a number of questions:

It has been clear to see that a lot of work had been done to increase awareness of the Fostering Service, however not everyone listens to the radio, uses social media or reads the news, therefore the use of billboards would be beneficial to attract interest. Did the Council consider using marketing to advertise key facts i.e. the number of children or young people who need to be fostered?

The Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support thanked Members for their feedback and advised that the service had been working with the Council's internal Communications Team on the new marketing scheme which included looking at other local authorities to see what marketing methods they currently use. The Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support advised that feedback provided by Members would be taken into consideration to help shape the marketing scheme and ensure all methods were targeted not just social media.

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance also advised Members that the Council were also working with a candid platform tool to support with research into the best marketing platforms.



What made Telford Fostering competitive compared to private fostering companies?

The Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support confirmed that part of the Council's approach is to use feedback and experiences of Foster Carers to continue to improve the current offer and ensure it remains competitive.

Did the Council look at referral schemes with regards to monetary referrals?

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance advised Members that for a number of years the Council had offered financial reward to foster carers referred and approved through various schemes.

What were the main issues with retention of Foster Carers?

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance confirmed that the Fostering Team regularly monitor carers exiting the programme through exit interviews to assist in obtaining feedback from carers to further improve and enhance the current offer. Members were advised that main carers who leave the service is a result of approved SGOs or retirement due to age.

Town and Parish Councils run regular events for residents. Could the Fostering Service have a stall at future events to publicise the foster carer offer?

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Performance advised that the Team recently attended an event at Newport Town Council and currently hold pop-up stall events across the borough, however would consider contacting other Town and Parish Councils to showcase at additional events.

CYP27 Work Programme

The Senior Democracy Officer (Scrutiny) presented the updated work programme to the Committee. As this was the last meeting of the municipal year, Members were informed that the work programme was currently being reviewed and Members had been invited to submit suggestions for the 2024/25 municipal year as part of this process.

CYP28 Chair's Update

None.

The meeting ended at 6.41 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday 7 November 2024