

Fostering Services Annual Report



Introduction

This is a report of the Fostering Service and covers the period of April 2016 –March 2017. It is noted that a report was last submitted in December 2016 as an interim position statement at that time.

It is acknowledged that a report was due to be published in April 2016 to bring reporting in line with an annual framework. The delay in submission of this report has been due to the need for a continued period of intensive self-evaluation and peer review, supported by our commissioner colleagues from Hampshire. Time has been productively used and focused upon service and practice development.

As outlined within the December 2016 report early indications of the service review process had already identified the requirement of significant change, development and practice improvements.

This report will address the roles and functions of the Fostering Service and update on the progress being made in relation to the improvement journey.

As stated within the December 2016 report development of key indicators for data reports to be produced from the PARIS system was required. Whilst there has been some progress made in this area it is not yet complete, therefore the ability to provide comprehensive data remains difficult in this report.

It is anticipated that this will have progressed sufficiently for the annual report of April 2017 - March 2018 to give a statistical base to evidence the progress made within the Fostering Service.

It is proposed moving forward that the Annual Report for Fostering will be finalised in April and published in May each year.

Role of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service continues to develop and improve practice to meet the needs of Children looked after in Torbay in line with the requirements of national guidance and fostering standards.

It is responsible for:

- Recruitment and assessment of foster carers;
- Support, supervision and training of foster carers including family and friend carers (connected carers) and family to family carers (specific to disabled children and their families)
- Ensuring provision of safe and supportive foster placements which are local for children looked after, providing opportunity to keep siblings together where assessed as being in their best interests
- Promoting placement stability and permanence planning
- Private Fostering

The Fostering Service provides a range of placements with foster carers with a varied skill and experience base. There are a range of placements offered including respite and short term breaks which includes Family to Family households specialising in offering support to children with disabilities and their families; placements with foster carers who have particular experience and skills in transition to permanence through adoption, return home or placement with family; placements providing permanence through long term fostering, providing a family based modal of care to support children and young people through to independence and beyond.

There are also family and friends who are presenting for assessment as connected carers to look after children in their extended family or social network.

All foster carers are supervised and supported by social workers within the fostering team and this includes all connected carers who are afforded opportunity to engage in training and support alongside other foster carers.

It is an aim of the service to develop a more focused approach to offering support and training to connected carers moving forward in response to feedback from connected carers.

The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of high quality, safe and aspirational foster placements that meet the needs of Torbay children looked after.

The priorities of the Fostering Service are to ensure that:

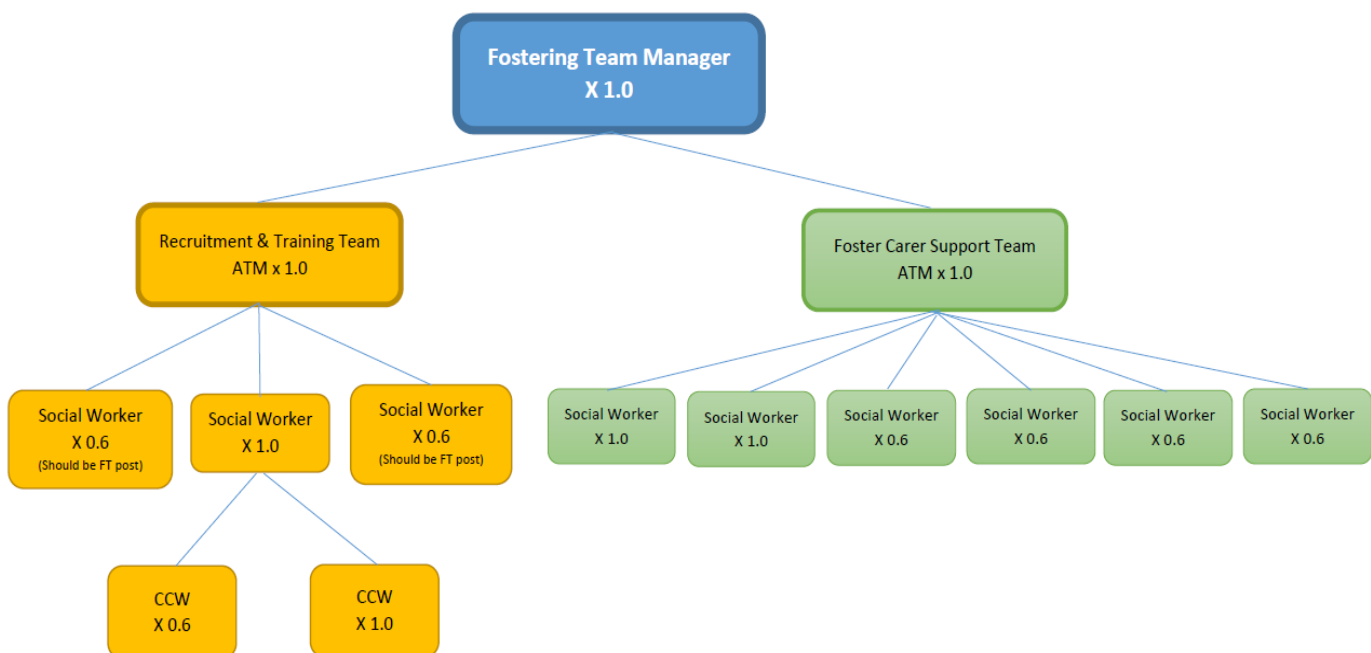
- All children who come into care have an experience of safe, secure and consistent care
- All children experience a safe place within which they can play, grow and thrive, being supported to reach their full potential.

- Ensure the holistic needs of any child are addressed and supported through health, education and social development enhancing opportunity to develop resilience and achieve.
- Support early Permanence for children in care and ensure that children who cannot safely remain at home are offered a permanent family base without delay

The Fostering Service includes responsibility for Privately Fostered Children and young people in Torbay in line with The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2015 and National Minimum Standards.

Service Structure

Torbay's Fostering Service is managed under the Head of Service for Specialist Services, with responsibility as the Ofsted registered fostering manager. There is an operational Team Manager with responsibility for this service.



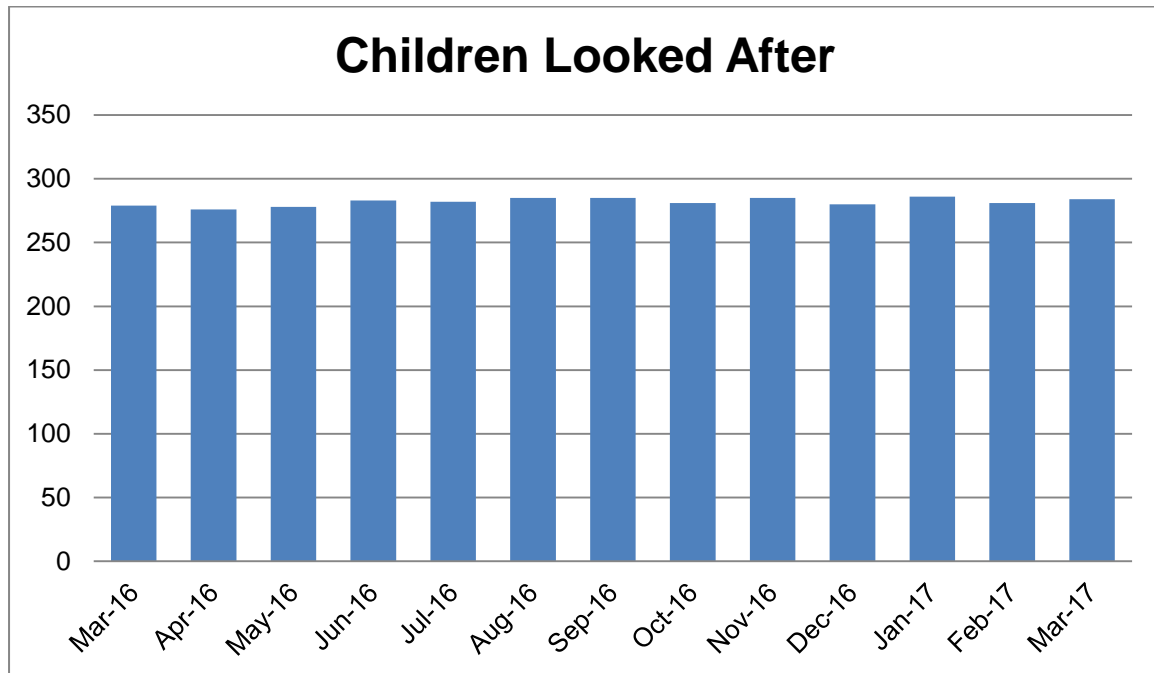
The team of social workers and CCW's have roles and responsibilities within the service focusing upon recruitment and assessment, and/or supervising and supporting foster carers.

There are two Assistant Team managers who have defined areas of responsibility and who offer supervision and line management to staff within the team.

The Team Manager has the responsibility for the overall service, including the quality assurance of reports to the fostering panel linking with the agency advisor.

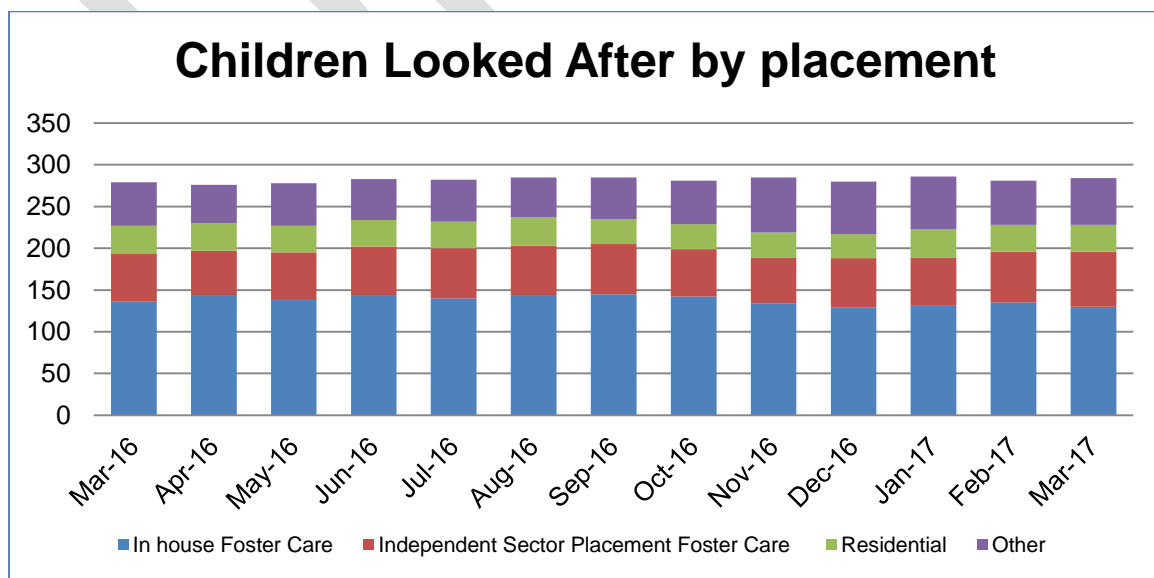
Children Looked After

The number of children looked after at the end of March 2017 was 284. This figure has remained relatively stable over the last 2 years. During 2016/17, children looked after were at the highest in January 2017 when they rose to 286. Over the year, the number of children looked after rose by just under 2% compared to 6.6% amongst comparable authorities.



There was a 4% fall in the number of children placed within in house fostering placements over 2016/17 which contributed to a rise in the use of independent fostering placements during this period.

At the end of 2016/17, 76% of all children looked after were in foster placements which is in line with similar authorities. Of these children, 67% were in in-house foster care.



Key: Other =Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation

Recruitment Performance

The number of enquiries received for fostering in the period 2016-2017 shows a continuation of decline. The number of approvals in the period is considerably lower than previous years.

There would be a slight increase to this figure if it were to include connected carers, this only being 3

Performance in relation to the conversion rate of the enquiries to approval has declined year on year.

| Years | Number of enquiries | Approvals | Conversion |
|--------------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 2014- 2015 | 118 | 29 | 24 |
| 2015- 2016 | 65 | 10 | 15 |
| 2016- 2017 | 42 | 3 | 7 |

Numbers of Foster Carers:

It is evident that the recruitment numbers of carers has been declining year on year since 2014-2015. The marketing strategy of that time which was the implementation of one pay rate of £400 per child proved successful, with a high increase of carers moving across from Independent Fostering Agencies.

Following this the recruitment strategy and marketing was marketed as specific to requiring carers for much older children and decisions were made to defer any assessments for carers who wished to support younger children.

Whilst this was sustainable and appropriate for a short period it is recognised that delay in a review of the marketing strategy resulted in continued decline in interest for Torbay Fostering service.

As noted in the report of December 2016, following a review of sufficiency Torbay adopted a new skills based fostering allowance as of May 2016. The period following this was a difficult time with a loss of confidence in our existing foster carers. It was recognised that part of this was the result of concerns relating to the revised Foster Carer Agreement. Work was undertaken to resolve all issues and amendments made to assure foster carers their voice had been heard.

Data to support accurate reporting of a breakdown of households is not available for this report however this will be rectified for the 2017 - 2018 report.

The Interim Team Manager has focused work on ensuring due process, that is reviewed through the Fostering panel, has been followed where there have been concerns raised relating to foster carers ability to maintain the expected minimum standards.

It can be reported that as part of the review of the service there has been a focus on ensuring foster carers have maintained their registration and have been supported to review their skill base.

This has been effective in supporting some households to increase their registration to accommodate more children however this has also supported the de registration of foster carers who no longer meet minimum standards.

Foster Carer quarterly Forums led by the Head of Service and Interim Team Manager, with Director and Assistant Director participation, commenced in November 2016. These meetings have continued and progressed positively with a high attendance rate from foster carers.

These meetings have been instrumental in improving the relationships between the Fostering Service and foster carers. As a result of the increasing trust and positive working relationships we are beginning to see an increase in foster carers confidence in offering placements to Torbay children as opposed to holding vacancies.

It is anticipated that the increase in the in house fostering sufficiency will be accurately reflected in the annual report of 2017-2018.

Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and Campaign:

A review of the recruitment and marketing strategy was undertaken in January 2017.

The focused work undertaken to improve relationships with the current foster carer cohort was a required first step to moving forward in order to support the much needed repair to the reputation for Torbay Fostering Service.

We are fortunate to have committed and experienced foster carers who demonstrate compassion and willingness to love and care for children, who we have needed to acknowledge have experienced a period of ongoing change which has been fraught with frustrations and difficulties.

The quarterly foster carer meetings with Head of Service and Interim Team Manager have supported the forming of a more trusting relationship and have encouraged Foster Carer participation in service and practice development.

The service, with the support of the foster carers, ran a competition for our children to produce the revised banner for our Fostering Service. This is now used on all Torbay Fostering communications and marketing materials.



The key change to our recruitment strategy was to ensure we promoted acceptance of interest in fostering in general and did not have a focused age or specific target group for the first stage of the campaign.

The important message was to reflect within our campaign that we were looking for prospective carers who would offer a child a home throughout their childhood recognising the need for stability in placements as a priority for all children in care.

The launch for our revised marketing campaign was planned to coincide with Foster Care Fortnight in May 2017.

In mid-March 2017 we promoted Torbay fostering Service through a radio advert actors Torbay, highlighting the message from a new campaign strap line of "Be the Best Carer".

The campaign was supported by our current foster carers with their presence being planned at the information events which have been scheduled throughout the Foster Care Fortnight dates in May 2017.

The effectiveness of this campaign and the expected increase in sufficiency to our in house fostering households will be reported on in annual report of 2017-2018. Early indications from interest following the radio advert show that this has been successful.

Summary and Review of progress since the December 2016 report:

During this period there has been continued focus upon practice improvement. Our peer review audits from our Hampshire colleagues report that there is clear evidence of management oversight and regular supervision on case records.

Alongside foster carers the team have established a new recording template for the supervision of Foster Carers and a specific audit tool is now being used to inform our knowledge of the service.

There have been practice improvements made with new process being embedded such as 'back up carer' scheme which affords assessment of foster carers family members to support children to remain in their home and be cared for by trusted adults known to them avoiding placement move for respite.

Ongoing practice development has progressed with the development of specific carer records on PARIS system being fully completed. Social worker analysis is now a recording field on all appropriate documents.

The Foster carer training review has been undertaken with participation of foster carers who have been instrumental in advising on the changes to be made.

Foster carers have commenced the review of support groups and to consider which regional support for all, alongside smaller foster carer led groups.

Support groups are to be considered for family to family carers and connected carers, recognising the difference of support needs in these carers households.

Fostering Changes train the trainer courses are planned for April/May 2017 following high attendance to the information event in January 2017.

Fostering Changes **Implementation Plan – Stage 2**

May First Train the Trainer cohort completed by Kings College. Twelve trainers trained. This included Foster Carers.

May Training session for trainers
To review the 12 plus package

Course Delivery All cohorts will be open to all foster carers.

Cohort 1: September to December (Interviews and planning – August)

Cohort 2: November to February (Interviews and planning – September/ October)

Cohort 3: January- March (Interviews and planning – November/December)

Cohort 4: April – July (Interviews and planning – February/ March)

Additional CPD Additional Workshops to be offered from Spring Term.

Social Care Half day workshop to be offered in September for Fostering Social Workers

Workforce and Children Looked After Teams to provide underpinning knowledge of Fostering Changes. Safeguarding and Reviewing Service to be invited to attend. This is to be delivered by Helen, Lumi and Carol with support of Foster Carers.

Looking ahead to 2017/2018 the service will be:

Maintaining positive relationships with Foster Carers to ensure participation in Practice and Service Improvement

Refreshing, revising and driving forward an energetic recruitment campaign to attract prospective foster carers to Torbay Council's Fostering service

Reviewing and developing foster carer support groups (to include specific groups for connected carers and family to family), training for foster carer

Completing Practice Standards to ensure consistency and continued practice improvement

Developing systems to ensure data capture is improved and informs service development and reports for the service going forward

Reviewing and developing the foster carer's training program- increasing online resources

Reviewing and developing the foster carer's annual review process

Amanda White
Head of Service – Specialist Services