

Meeting: Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 4th May 2021

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: The effectiveness of the arrangements for fostering and residential care, including the options for meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require specialist provision within Torbay

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to provide members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board with an update on the effectiveness of the arrangements for fostering and residential care, including the options for meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require specialist provision within Torbay
- 1.2 In line with the Sufficiency Strategy 2021-24, Torbay Children's Services wish to:
 - continue to increase the numbers and capability of in-house foster carers and reviewing the existing bank of carers to develop and match their skills to the needs of our children.
 - reduce the use of out of local area provision which may disadvantage children and young people.
 - provide a robust commissioning framework which is effectively responding to the sufficiency challenges and driving up standards.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to outline the effectiveness of the current arrangements for fostering and residential care, and include the options for meeting the needs of children and young people with complex needs who require specialist provision within Torbay that are set out in section 2 below.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The benefits of the above approach are set out below. Torbay Children's Service;
 - wants cared for children, including children with disabilities, to receive appropriate additional packages of support within placement, which may include

education, therapy and drug and alcohol intervention. These will be delivered by partner agencies in some situations.

- wants assessment, matching and placement planning to be child focused and evidence-based, and including clear expectations in terms of placement provision and contingency, exit or transition planning.
- wants placement provision to be of consistently high quality and robustly monitored through the commissioning framework, contract management and quality assurance processes
- will, by actively managing and supporting the stability of the child's living arrangements, aim to reduce the likelihood of avoidable placement and education disruption which will positively impact on outcomes for children and young people.
- wants placements for our cared for children and children who require respite placements to be safe and consistently able to meet the needs of our children and young people.
- wants fewer children and young people to be living a significant distance from Torbay and their local area.
- wants fewer children to be placed in residential settings but for those who are, we require rigorous evaluation to ensure that it continues to meet their needs and for those who can move there should be robust and timely exit and transition planning.

2.1 The proposals in this report help us to deliver this ambition by exploring all available options to enhance local placement provision and ensure that children who require care, whether on a short, medium or long term basis, benefit from provision which is carefully matched to their individual needs. This will directly improve the delivery of services for some of the most vulnerable children in our community, who require consistent, safe and nurturing care. By having a specific focus on their needs, it will also ensure that children with disabilities benefit from access to a wide range of respite placements.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- (i) That members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board note the contents of the report and the progress made.

Appendices

None

Background Documents

[Placements with Parents \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

[Fostering Panel \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There are, as of the 12th April 2021, 317 cared for children supported by Torbay Children's Services. These children are of varying ages, with varying plans of permanence, and who require placement provision which in line with their assessed and specific needs. This can include short term foster placements, medium to long term foster placements, residential placements or high quality sixteen plus semi-independent accommodation.
- 1.2 Following the re-inspection in 2018, there was an increase in how many children were placed in residential settings; at the 31st May 2019, 41 children were placed in a residential placement. This was in part due to the lack of management grip and oversight at that time, as well as a lack of local fostering families, provisions and settings.
- 1.3 As a result of the increase in children being placed in such settings, the Independent Placements Overview Panel was introduced in August 2019, in order to have a robust oversight of the independent placements for all children and mitigate against drift and delay in onward planning and transition planning.
- 1.4 At the present time, authorisation is required from the Director of Children's Services to initiate a residential placement search; similarly, should a residential placement be identified as the most appropriate match for a child, this can only be agreed at Director level. This reflects the understanding that residential should be the last option for a child and that a family setting should be sourced wherever possible. On the rare occasion when a residential setting is felt to be in the short term best interests of a child or young person, social workers and Team Managers are encouraged to consider exit or move on planning at the very point the placement is made and is expected be formalised within the placement planning meeting.
- 1.5 As of the 19th April 2021, 19 children are placed in a residential setting.
- 1.6 Of the 316 cared for children, 51% live within Torbay; 21% live in a neighbouring authority; 28% live outside of Torbay and the neighbouring authority.
- 1.7 The Placements Team continue to build positive relationships with independent fostering agencies and placement providers and this relationship-based approach has been instrumental in working with providers to identify suitable and viable placement options for children and young people. An example of this effective joint work is in respect of one young person currently cared for within a residential setting; the Placements Team have worked closely with an independent fostering agency in respect of a step down placement more local to Torbay, in which intensive intervention can take place to prepare this young person for returning to a family setting. Alongside this, joint work between the Placements Team and the agency will be concurrent, to search for and secure an appropriate family fostering placement for him.
- 1.8 In addition, the Peninsula contract ensures ongoing work with Plymouth, Devon and Somerset, with thirteen placement providers on this contract who are able to offer

local fostering and residential provisions to the cared for child of Torbay. This contract is now in its fourth year, with a tender evaluation planned this year to prepare for a new contract being implemented in April 2021. Regular contract monitoring meetings take place on a quarterly basis, which an ongoing understanding of the sufficiency of placements, the progress of recruitment and the mechanism through which quality assurance is undertaken.

- 1.9 In terms of in-house provision, there continues to be a focus and drive in terms of fostering recruitment and assessment, in conjunction with a clear communications plan and targeted recruitment of fostering families who may be able to offer placements to children whereby there is a gap in the current local provision. This includes ongoing recruitment to the Resilience Fostering Pathway, which is focused on the recruitment of foster carers with specific skills, capacity and knowledge in respect of the care of older children, or children with complex needs.
- 1.10 As of the 19th April 2021, the Recruit, Train and Assessment data collation is as follows for the period of the financial year 20/21:
- 95 initial enquiries have been received in the period.
 - Fifteen Form C applicants had gone through panel by the 24th March 2021 with an additional Form C being heard at Panel on the 19th April 2021 and one further Form C assessment with ADM for sign off = total 17.
 - Form F applicants have been approved at Fostering Panel and another ten are currently in assessment. This is a total of thirty which, if all currently in assessment progress to approval, would give a 32% conversion rate. As it stands, with twenty approvals, this is conversion rate from initial enquiry of 21%.
 - Fourteen resignations have been received to date within the period = net gain of five new fostering households.
 - Twenty-five SGOs had been completed to date = totalling twenty-seven assessment.
 - Eighteen Special Guardianship Orders have been granted in Court; in addition, one applicant positively assessed then withdrew at the Final Hearing.
 - There are seven Special Guardianship Order assessments currently being completed. This totals fifty-three Special Guardianship Order assessments completed within the period.
- 1.11 A Fostering Recruitment and Retention officer is now in post and will be providing all current data in relation to recruitment, including the number of enquiries and numbers of enquiries converting to initial visits and/or full assessments. This will include information pertaining to why any application does not get progressed.
- 1.11 Work is currently being undertaken jointly with commissioning in respect of a joint project between Torbay Children's Services and Home for Good. Home for Good is a national Christian fostering and adoption focused charity working to inspire Christians to foster or adopt and equipping the church communities to support those who are caring for vulnerable children. Home for Good works with local authorities to develop and strengthen connections with local churches around foster carer recruitment and retention so they can best meet their obligations as corporate parents to the children in their care. Home for Good have developed a variety of resources to support prospective carers to explore whether fostering or adoption is for them, including online events and a national enquiry line to provide information for those exploring and support for those already caring.

- 1.12 There is also now an increased focus on the use of edge of care provision, in situations whereby reunification is a potentially safe and viable plan for children and young people. We have enhanced the monitoring and assessment of potential reunification options and are increasingly seeing to implement bespoke packages of support for children returning home to the care of their parents.
- 1.13 A new position within the Fostering Assessment Team has now also been implemented [Recruitment Co-Ordinator].

2. Options under consideration

- 2.1 Option one: continue with the current plan of fostering recruitment. This would include the work of the Recruitment Co-Ordinator, the Fostering Assessment team and the Communications team and would focus on recruitment to the resilience pathway and targeted recruitment for in-house carers on all bases, with a specific focus on those respite carers who can meet the complex needs of children and children with disabilities. This would be in line with other recruitment activity.
- 2.3 Option Two: Consider a High Dependency Carers pathway or Family to Family Pathway to increase numbers of respite carers able to meet the needs of children with complex needs, or children with disabilities.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 3.1 The work being undertaken to enhance the local provision of in-house foster placements will ultimately reduce dependency on the use of independent agencies and continue to decrease dependency on residential placements. Cared for children in Torbay will have access to high quality, long term, local placements which are assessed as meeting their needs.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 Torbay will continue to meet the statutory timescales in terms of their responsibilities to cared for children as per The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children Act 1989.
- 4.2 In-house fostering placements will not only meet the Fostering Minimum standards, but will provide high quality care to cared for children and young people. Foster carers will be in receipt of a wide range of training opportunities to improve their practice, and develop their understanding of their role in achieving better outcomes for cared for children.

5. Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 We continue to engage in a wide range of participation strategies to inform the ongoing review and improvement of the fostering service. This includes: a dip sample of stability meetings, themes in terms of difficulties or issues arising which impact on placement stability and recommendations for practice; creation and implementation of thematic quarterly surveys to gain the views of our fostering families; joint work with CORAM BAAF in respect of the Bright Spots Your Life In and After Care surveys for all cared for children and care experienced adults aged 18-21; the use of Peninsula strategy to increase engagement with independent fostering agencies.

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

6.1 Not applicable at this time as this report has been prepared to provide an update on existing services

7. Tackling Climate Change

7.1 Enhancing local provision would decrease the need for significant journeys to be made to visit children out of county.

Equality Impacts; Not applicable at this time as this report has been prepared to provide an update on existing services - Should any proposed changes to these services be identified in the future the relevant EIA will be undertaken at that time if required.