

## Fostering Services Annual Report 2019/20



### Executive summary

The Council revised the sufficiency strategy in October 2019. At that stage the number of placements of children 20 miles or more away from their home was 136 or 39.3% of the looked after population in Torbay. Overall, 174 children (49%) are placed outside of the authority's boundaries. The latest comparator figures show national averages to be at 13% for children placed 20 or more miles away and 12.3% of children are placed outside of the local authority boundary. This data demonstrates graphically the importance of immediate action to firstly, understand our social work and commissioning practices and, secondly, to ensure we have placements available for children close to their home.

Figures for Children looked after in March 2019 indicate an increase of 29 to 359 from September 2018 data when 327 children were looked after by the authority (not including those children being looked after as part of a respite care arrangement). This is 39 children more than in 2017 indicating a 13.5% increase. This means that 129 per ten thousand children are now looked after by the authority which reflects an unsustainable 79% increase since 2010. This rate is marginally over double the national average and significantly exceeds, by 36%, the average of our statutory neighbours which is a concern on both counts. In our Statistical Neighbour Group, our rate is only exceeded by Blackpool, a local authority also judged to be inadequate in its last inspection.

Fostering is a key strategic priority and we must invest in a shared view that fostering should be available for our children locally.

The emphasis of the service during Quarter 4 of the year has been focused intently upon future requirements for the service. This is to ensure that we are able to meet the sufficiency challenges facing the council.

In March 2020, a paper which intends to improve the role of fostering and make it central to the sufficiency strategy was agreed by Cabinet.

This will be achieved by:

- Implementing a revised fee structure for Torbay Foster Carers by the end of May 2020 and linking this both to skills of the carer and to the age of the child. This proposal will be subject to a short consultation period with foster carers and it is noted that no carers will be negatively affected by changes in the fee structure. We are also committed to providing opportunities for dialogue and feedback.
- Creating a Resilience Fostering Service. This will be to provide homes as a direct alternative placement option for those children who are at risk of being placed in, or are currently in residential care.
- Provide specialist and targeted training to all foster carers and supervising social workers. This training will be extended to those workers who are involved in the edge of care work. This training will focus on trauma informed practice and providing support and training in the use of Non-Violent Resistance. It is intended to fund this through the existing training budget.
- Improve placement stability by providing access as required to support services to work with the child and the carer.
- Improving access for foster carers to the edge of care team to promote resilience in care arrangements and to promote placement stability.

Fostering Services cannot do this alone and the Council's updated sufficiency strategy (October 2019) sets an ambitious, yet fully achievable aim to improve the placement sufficiency for children at the same time as being able to achieve cost reductions. The fostering service fits alongside, and has interdependencies with the implementation of a fully functioning Edge of Care service to support older children to remain at home. This will be achieved by the development of residential services local to Torbay. It will also improve and ensure timely permanence decisions for children and ensure that there is stable and sustainable workforce.

This report identifies that the fostering service in the year 2019/20 has not yet achieved a position where it offers high quality services to most children and young people in Torbay, and has not achieved its recruitment targets for the year. The report does demonstrate that the service is absolutely focused on what is needed to support Torbay children and during Quarter 4 (January–March 2020) has demonstrated its commitment to improvement during the 2020/21 year.

## Introduction

This is a report of the Fostering Service and covers the period of April 2019 – March 2020.

This report will address the roles and functions of the Fostering Service including the introduction of a specific Special Guardianship support service set up in 2019. It will also update on the continuing progress being made by Torbay towards having a well-developed and targeted variety of community support arrangements and high quality placements within and around Torbay.

In previous reports it was acknowledged that the fostering team lacked the ability to be able to provide information to inform the key indicators for data reports and that this would need to be addressed. By the beginning of 2019 PARIS was set up to provide daily reports to managers on outstanding tasks within the service to ensure minimal drift and delay and obtain a more accurate reflection on service delivery.

Throughout 2019/20 the Fostering service has endeavored to ensure that there are a range of placement options for children which offer both high quality and cultural appropriateness. We recognize that much more still needs to be done in order to provide a fully diverse range of placement options which will meet the needs of the children of Torbay and 2020/21 will be crucial in demonstrating how the service is meeting these demands.

## 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 Minimum Standards 2011 and Fostering Regulations.

Currently the Fostering Service provides a range of different placement types that are as follows:

- **connected persons:** A connected person is a relative, friend or other significant person connected with a child. Family and friends can play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain living with people they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents.
- **short-term fostering:** Some children initially live with short term foster carers whilst decisions are made around their permanence, including reunification with their families.
- **long-term fostering:** A child will become part of a family until they grow up. Not all children want to be adopted, especially older children or those who continue to have regular contact with relatives.
- We also aspire to improve access to **resilience fostering**. This will include provision for specific 'remand' placements, and foster carers to support young people in care aged 10-18 years with particularly complex needs. Some of these children may additionally be in the youth justice system or disabled. This is a specialist role, and the foster carers need skills and experience of

working with these groups to really make a difference, help them turn their lives around and reach their full potential. We will also consider the efficacy of introducing a parent and baby foster care resource as a direct alternative to residential provision.

It is also responsible for:

Recruitment and assessment of foster carers, support, supervision and training of foster carers and promoting placement stability and permanence planning. Additionally, it is responsible for respite and short term breaks for children with disabilities and their families and for supporting transitions to permanence through adoption or return home.

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

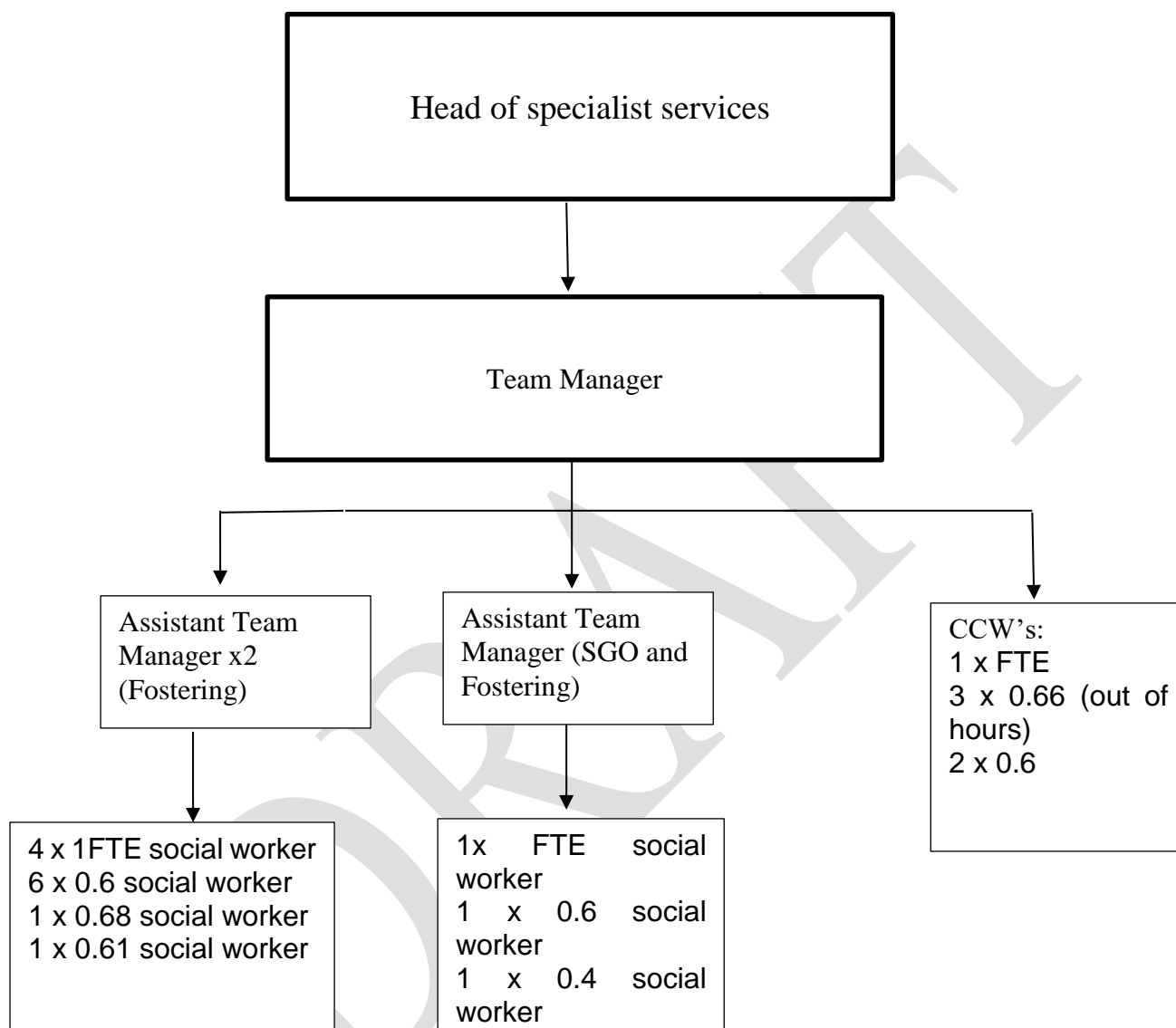
- All children who come into care have an experience of safe, secure and consistent care.
- All children experience a safe place within which they can play, grow and thrive, being supported to reach their full potential.
- Ensure the holistic needs of any child are addressed and supported through health, 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.
- That we have sufficient local placements for children who come into care, and that those placements are well supported.

## **Service Structure**

Torbay's Fostering Service is managed under the Head of Service for Specialist Services. There is an operational Team Manager who has the responsibility for the overall service, including the quality assurance of reports to the fostering panel linking and acting as the agency advisor.

Additionally there are three assistant team managers who have defined areas of responsibility and who offer supervision and line management to staff within the team.

## Team structure



## Children Looked After

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, figures for Children looked after in March 2019 indicate an increase of 29 to 359 (13%) from September 2018 data when a total of 324 children were looked after by the authority by the end of 2018 (not including those children being looked after as part of respite care arrangements). This is 39 children more than in 2017 indicating a 13.5% increase. Currently, 129 per ten thousand children are now looked after by the authority which reflects an unsustainable 79% increase since 2010. This rate is marginally over double

the national average and significantly exceeds by 36% the average of our statutory neighbours (SN) which is a concern on both counts. In our SN group, our rate is only exceeded by Blackpool, a local authority also judged to be inadequate in its last inspection.

<b>Age group</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>03/2016</b>	<b>03/2017</b>	<b>03/2018</b>	<b>03/2019</b>	<b>09/2019</b>
under 1	F	6	11	14	8	12
	M	5	8	15	5	7
	U					1
1-4	F	18	18	23	28	26
	M	14	14	17	26	12
5-9	F	32	27	31	28	27
	M	36	33	27	35	34
10-15	F	48	61	68	75	79
	M	66	62	73	91	81
16+	F	26	17	24	30	34
	M	25	32	32	33	38
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>276</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>351</b>

The cohort of children looked after gradually increased in the last financial year (April 2018-March 2019) with 359 children looked after in March 2019 before a slow decrease was noted in the period to September 2019. Data underpinning the above statistics clearly show that the highest need for placements is for the age ranges 10 - 15 years old followed by the 16 plus cohort.

Data obtained from the 2019/20 sufficiency strategy tells us that the number of placements of children 20 miles or more away from their home is 136 or 39.3% of the looked after population of Torbay. Overall, 174 (49%) children are placed outside of the local authority's boundary. The latest comparator figures show national averages to be at 13% for children placed 20 or more miles away and 12.3% beyond boundaries. This data demonstrates graphically the importance of immediate action to both understand our social work and commissioning practices and to ensure we have placements available for children close to their homes.

Although there has been some levelling off in the numbers of children in care in 2019, there has been a steady rise in the care population since 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 with data collated in September 2019 showing an increase of 27% (359 looked after children) . As stated above, of significance are the increases in the 10-15 and 16+ cohorts which are numerically (by 46 and 21) and proportionately (by 40% and 41%) significantly increased. It is well researched that without concerted action, children in these age groups are more likely to remain in the care population and are likely to be disproportionately represented in high cost placements.

## Recruitment Performance

During 2019/2020 the fostering service received a total of 51 initial enquiries from which two fostering households were approved.

Years	Number of enquiries	Approvals	Conversion %
2014- 2015	118	29	24
2015- 2016	65	10	15
2016- 2017	42	3	7
2017 - 2018	86	10	12
2018 - 2019	45	4	9
2019 - 2020	51	2	4

The conversion of enquiries to approval as foster carers during 2019/20 has been low at 4%. In recognition of this, the sufficiency strategy has acknowledged the need for the Council to revise its communication and marketing strategy for the recruitment of foster carers. It has also acknowledged the need to adopt an ambitious and targeted approach to increase the number of in-house carers, including those who provide specialist services. This will also include the potential to explore collaborative approaches of different types with neighbouring councils, and the creative use of media.

The service identified a target to increase the fostering households in Torbay in 2019/20 by net 10. This target has not been met, reflecting poor recruitment activity in the early parts of the year before significant improvement in quarter 4. The recruitment activity has resulted in 8 assessments starting in Quarter 4, with approval dates expected in Quarter 2 and 3 of 2020/21. One household was approved at fostering panel in early April 2020. The improved position has been assisted by re-focusing work from the Community Care Workers in the team to responding to all enquiries within 24 hours and arranging to meet with potential foster carers within 72 hours. We will introduce a recruitment officer post in the 2020/21 year to support the ongoing recruitment activity within the team.

## Numbers of Foster Carers (as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020):

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 the total number of approved fostering households was 98 which is comprised as follows:

Fostering Household types (sum 98)	Numerical	%
Mainstream (units)	74	75%
Respite only (units)	2	2%
Family and Friends (units)	22	22%

Keeping Torbay children as close to their family origin where appropriate is a key measure of positive outcomes for children and young people. Regrettably the target to increase by net 10 was not met this year.

Throughout 2019/2020 financial year there have been **0** cases through the Independent Review Mechanism process.

During 2019/2020 12 mainstream foster carers were de registered

There are broken down as follows:

- 5 carers resigned following concerns raised about their care.
- 1 resigned due to change in circumstances
- 1 resigned after 35 years
- 1 resigned and moved to an independent foster agency.

## Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and Campaign

Although we are fortunate to have committed and experienced foster carers who demonstrate compassion and willingness to love and care for children, new foster carer enquiries numbers remained low in Torbay in the 19/20 year which is concerning when considering the year on year increase of children coming into care as mentioned earlier in this report.

To help resolve this the Fostering Team have identified the need for a reinvigorated fostering campaign which has included redesigning our recruitment materials to target families who will be able to care for children from ethnic minorities, sibling groups, adolescents and children who are disabled. The new campaign will be launched, alongside an improved foster carer offer, during fostering fortnight in May 2020.



In addition, we have undertaken drop in information sessions once a month for prospective Foster carers, the last one generating two new enquiries before the COVID 19 pandemic. We have also placed our marketing posters across Torbay in locations such as bus stop advertisement boards. We have advertised on local radio and in local newspapers and are supported by some local businesses which has enabled us to provide free tickets to football matches, shows and seasonal events. As stated herein, there has been a significant increase in enquiries and the allocation of assessments during Quarter 4.

### **Foster carer support**

Over the last year we have established a process and developed the performance indicator system to ensure that we have management oversight on all of our fostering files. As stated this makes sure that foster carers are receiving regular supervision and that their annual reviews remain on time.

The fostering service provide training, support and development to all foster carers as required through Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011. A specific PACE course was delivered twice in 2019 as well as courses around blocked care, de-escalation techniques and attachment trauma. Additional workshops will be provided to cover key issues such as allegations, supervising contact, online safety and child exploitation this year.

Quarterly Foster Carer forums are held, during which we invite guest speakers to share knowledge and expertise from their field. Additionally, fostering support groups are run monthly with staggered times (including evenings) and venues to ensure those foster carers that wish to attend are able to do so.

A clinical psychologist has worked within the service for one day per week during Quarter 3 and 4. The support provided to carers was a consultation process to provide advice and guidance. Unfortunately the impact on children is limited in the 2019/20 year. We intend to put in place support for carers by training Community Care Workers in the facilitation of Non-violent Resistance (NVR) and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) in Quarter 1 and 2 of 2020/21. It is intended that this will support foster carers to prevent placement breakdown and to promote placement stability.

### **Special Guardianship support team**

The Special Guardianship support team was set up in March 2019 having previously been provided for within the Adoption service until this moved to the Regional Adoption Agency. Currently the team offers support to twenty guardians who have been through the court process and now have permanence orders in place for children. Additionally another 52 Special Guardians are known to the service and are offered free training in line with Foster carers training and are offered six support sessions per year through the SGO support groups with guest speakers and topics relevant to their needs.

The team took responsibility for commissioning all SGO assessments of children within Torbay in quarter 4. There are currently 12 SGO assessments being undertaken or overseen by the team, of which seven are foster carers wishing to apply for SGO for those children placed with them. The team also supports children's social workers where children are subject to an SGO to access therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF).

### **Next steps:**

As mentioned earlier in this report, Torbay has more than the national average of children aged 11-15 placed with independent fostering agencies (IFA's) which suggests that our 'in house' fostering service is unable to meet the challenges that older children present, which means that the children concerned are often placed in more expensive placements which are also more likely to be out of area.

The Council's updated sufficiency strategy sets an ambitious, yet fully achievable aim to improve the placement sufficiency for children at the same time as being able to achieve cost reductions. The fostering service fits alongside, and has interdependencies with the implementation of a fully functioning Edge of Care service to support older children to remain at home; the development of residential services in Torbay; ensuring timely permanence decisions for children, and that there is a stable and sustainable workforce.

These findings re-enforce the need to focus upon developing the resources that can be provided by our 'in house' carers because firstly it is right for children, and will contribute to easing budget pressures by ensuring that money which has hitherto been spent on placements, can instead be redistributed to providing support directly to children.

This will be achieved by:

- Implementing a revised fee structure for Torbay foster carers by the end of May 2020 and linking this both to skills of the carer and to the age of the child. This proposal will be subject to a short consultation period with foster carers and it is noted that no carers will be negatively affected by changes in the fee structure, but we are committed to providing opportunities for dialogue and feedback.
- Creating a Resilience Fostering Service to provide homes as a direct alternative placement option for those children who are at risk of being placed in, or are currently in residential care.
- Provide specialist and targeted training to all foster carers and supervising social workers. This training will be extended to those workers who are involved in the edge of care work. The focus of such training will be around trauma informed practice and providing support and training in the use of non-violent resistance. It is envisaged that this will be funded through the existing training budget.
- Improve placement stability by providing access, as required, to support services who will work with both the child and the carer.

- Providing access for foster carers to a newly developed edge of care team to promote resilience in care arrangements and to ensure placement stability
- Launching the reinvigorated campaign during fostering fortnight.

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