



REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE– 30 MAY 2019

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Consider the Fostering Service Annual Report and provide comments to the Service; and
- 1.2 Continue to support the ongoing recruitment of Foster Carers across Aberdeenshire.

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 The aims of Aberdeenshire's Children's Services are first and foremost to enable and support children to remain in their families of origin and, where this is not possible and where alternative, permanent, family based care is required, the Fostering Service recruits, prepares and supports families who can meet the needs of Aberdeenshire's children who require to be looked after away from home in an alternative family arrangement.
- 2.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service has its practice underpinned by the core components, values and principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and within the legislative context of The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.
- 2.3 The Service is a regulated Service and inspected every two years by the Care Inspectorate against the [National Standards](#).
- 2.4 The Service is delighted to present its Annual Report for 2018/19 (Appendix 1) which outlines the progress made over the last year to meet the needs of Aberdeenshire's children who require to be looked after by foster families.
- 2.5 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section E.1.1 (a) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, as the matter relates to Children's Services.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the report is an annual report and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 There are no staffing implications.
- 4.3 Financial implications become relevant for the Council when the Service is unable to recruit both enough, and the right, foster carers for the number of children requiring to be cared for. Where the Service is unable to match children to Aberdeenshire foster carers, the Service must be purchased from the voluntary sector at around £900 per week per child. As per paragraph 10.7 in Appendix 1, Aberdeenshire placed 15 children with Third Sector foster carers in 2018 in line with the National Framework.
- 4.4 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level

- ACORP001 – Budget pressures;
[Corporate Risk Register.](#)

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- BSSR001 – Balancing the books;
- ECSSR003 – Embedding GIRFEC; and
- ECSSR004 – Support inclusive, vibrant and healthy communities.
[Directorate Risk Registers.](#)

Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services

Report prepared by Elaine Dickson & Irene Sutherland, Fostering Team Managers North & South Central
Date 22 April, 2019

Appendix 1

Annual Report of the Fostering Service 1st January 2018 – 31st December 2018

Background

- 1.1 The practice of Aberdeenshire Council's Fostering Service, located within Children's Services is underpinned by the core components, values and principles of GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child). These are enshrined within the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, which replaced the previous Fostering regulations.
- 1.2 The Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality foster care placements to Aberdeenshire's children and young people who require alternative family-based care.
2. **Aberdeenshire's Fostering Service consists of:**
 - 2 Fulltime equivalent (FTE) Team Managers
 - 3 FTE Practitioners – Recruitment, Assessment and Training
 - 1 FTE Senior Practitioner – Supervision and Support
 - 9 FTE Social Workers – Supervision and Support
 - 3 Family Support Workers
3. **Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers**
 - 3.1 Ongoing recruitment of foster carers in Aberdeenshire remains challenging and the Local Authority competes not only with a neighbouring Authority but also with a number of voluntary agencies.
 - 3.2 The recruitment team use Facebook <http://bit.ly/fosterandadoptshire>, local advertising, the Fostering website, posters, information leaflets, good news stories and information evenings. We target geographically, and for specific groups for fostering, such as permanent and temporary fostering families for teenagers, children with disabilities, and large sibling groups. **77** Fostering information packs were requested during 2018.
 - 3.3 Whilst word of mouth recommendations from existing foster carers continues to invite interest (**8** registrations,) the Service has had an ongoing Facebook presence since December 2014. Facebook posts are regularly updated and contain information designed to generate interest in fostering.
 - 3.4 Our Facebook presence continues to grow and remains popular with both existing carers and potential applicants. We monitor the initial source of information on Fostering that new applicants state as being pivotal in their decision to note an interest in fostering with us and electronic sources such as the Facebook page and the website are quoted as being the initial source of information in **19** noted interests. From the **77** information packs sent out throughout Aberdeenshire in 2018, **34** households returned a Registration of Interest in Fostering.

4 Training of Prospective Foster Carers

- 4.1 Following prospective foster carers registering an interest in fostering, an initial visit is undertaken and where potential applicants wish to progress their application, they are invited to attend 'Skills to Foster' training. The prospective foster carers apply to foster after completing this training.
- 4.2 The 'Skills to Foster' training takes place over three full days, at separate times throughout the year and is mandatory for anyone wishing to apply to become a Foster carer. For couples, the expectation is that both applicants attend the training.
- 4.3 We deliver this training using The Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' materials. Training is delivered by dedicated Family Placement recruitment and training staff along with Aberdeenshire's experienced foster carers and Looked After young people. Input is also provided by both Social Work and Fostering staff. The training programme includes a dedicated session for the children of applicants.
- 4.4 Between 1st January 2018 and 31st December 2018, there were 3 cohorts of the 'Skills to Foster' training, which took place in March, June and November. There was a total of **23** prospective fostering households that attended the training.
- 4.5 **20** families proceeded to assessment following the training and applying to foster for Aberdeenshire. These figures reflect the national picture across the UK.

5. Approval

- 5.1 Following a period of robust assessment, the application for approval is presented to Aberdeenshire's Fostering, Kinship and Supported Lodgings Panel. Panel members scrutinise the application prior to making a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker as per the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations, 2009.
- 5.2 The Panel is chaired by an independent Chair and made up of individuals with both lived experience and professional experience in alternative family care.
- 5.3 Information about the approval process is provided throughout the training and assessment period and applicants are invited to attend the Panel when their application to become approved foster carers is being considered.
- 5.4 Aberdeenshire's Fostering Panel made recommendations on **15** new applications for approval as foster carers from 1 January to 31 December 2018.

These applications consisted of:

- 2** Permanent Fostering Families (**2** couples)
- 9** Interim & Long Term (Temporary) Fostering Families (**8** couples & **1** single carer)
- 2** Interim & Short Break (Temporary/Respite) Fostering families (**2** couples)
- 2** Short Break (Respite) Fostering Families (**1** couple & **1** single carer)

6. Support

- 6.1 The training needs of Foster carers are considered and included within the annual Training Needs analysis for Aberdeenshire Council's Children's Services. Training that is required is noted by both Foster carers and Family Placement social workers within monthly supervision throughout the year. The training needs of individual Foster carers is also considered within their annual review.
- 6.2 This information informs the Training plan for the year. A programme of training is drawn up for Foster carers and they are provided with both written and electronic information about this. Foster carers can make an application to attend training and are provided with support to attend. From 1 January to 31 December 2018, the Foster Care training programme included the following:
- First Aid (mandatory training for all foster carers)
 - Child Protection (from Basic awareness modules through to CSE)
 - Food, Nutrition & Health courses
 - Therapeutic Parenting
 - Caring for Vulnerable Children
 - Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Trauma, Secondary Trauma & Self-Care
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences
 - Online safety
 - Positive interventions
 - Diversity
- 6.3 All Fostering households are required to complete 30 hours of learning and development annually, some of which can be accrued by attendance at formal training. This also encompasses e-learning as well as related reading.
- 6.4 Approximately 100 e-learning modules were completed by Aberdeenshire Foster Carers during 2018.

7. Support to Foster Carers

- 7.1 We recognise the significance of support to Foster carers in terms of both the placements Foster carers provide and general support with regard to the fostering task and its impact on families. In line with National Standards, our Family Placement workers supervise their Foster carers once per month. In addition to support from Family Placement workers, there are also dedicated Family Support workers whose role is specifically to provide support to Foster carers.
- 7.2 There are a range of networking and support opportunities provided by the Service. These include an annual subscription to the Fostering Network for each Fostering household, Foster carer Support groups including Men in Foster Care as well as group activities such as a Christmas meal and a summer picnic.
- 7.3 **48** Support groups were scheduled throughout 2018 and 233 Foster carers attended these groups. 4 'Men in Foster Care' groups took place and 43 male Foster carers attended. These meetings offer peer support and training. Training was given at 32 of these groups, covering subjects such as children's health and

behavioural issues, current issues affecting young people in local communities, autism & disabilities, child sexual exploitation, parental substance misuse, how to access on line training and access to leisure in Aberdeenshire. Speakers attended 2 of the Men in Foster Care groups and covered the Children's Hearing system and Self-Harm.

- 7.4 The children of Foster carers are also offered support by Family Placement support workers through group activities and individual contact. 3 group activities were planned for throughout the year and the children took part in ten pin bowling and a Christmas lunch.
- 7.5 Aberdeenshire has several Emergency Foster carers who provide Out of Hours emergency Service (OOHES) emergency placements on a rota basis.
- 7.6 Following the ongoing monitoring and review of the 24-hour telephone support line for Foster carers manned by Family Placement social workers since 2004, this support was withdrawn in Autumn 2018 due to the lack of calls being received. The majority of calls from Foster carers were being made to the Aberdeenshire Council Out of Hours Social Work service and this service continues to provide support.

8 Termination of Foster Carer Approval

- 8.1 **25** Fostering households requested that their approval as foster carers be terminated during 2018 due to changes in their circumstances including ill-health or retirement and also moving out of the geographical area due to securing new employment. The downturn in the local oil and gas industry has had an adverse impact on employment opportunities and subsequently several of our Fostering households have moved away.
- 8.2 On average there is a 10% reduction in Fostering households annually, therefore we are always striving to recruit to absorb these losses and retain our current fostering resource levels. This reflects the national picture across the UK as a whole.

9 Foster Carer Reviews

- 9.1 In line with Looked After Children (Scotland) regulations 2009, Foster Carers must be reviewed annually by a Chair independent of the Family Placement Service. These reviews usually take place within the foster carers home and provide scrutiny around the placements being offered, foster carer training and the support the foster carer is receiving from the Service. Foster Carers also have to be reviewed at the Fostering Panel at the end of their 1st year of fostering and every subsequent 3rd year.
- 9.2 There were **69** Foster carer annual reviews completed during 2018 and **25** fostering reviews were presented to the Fostering Panel.
- 9.3 With regard to learning and development, there were **6** Skills uplifts presented to and recommended by the Fostering Panel during the year. **5** fostering households moved from Skills Level 1 to Skills Level 2 and **1** fostering household moved from Skills Level 2 to Skills Level 3.

10 Placement of Children

- 10.1 From 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018, **139** referrals for placements were submitted to the Fostering service, excluding respite. **96** children and young people were placed with Aberdeenshire Foster carers (not including respite placements) and **71%** of the placements were planned. Children were aged from birth to 15 years and 11 months old. Children placed had a wide range of needs, including children with very complex needs and challenging behaviour.
- 10.2 The introduction of Continuing Care means that young people can now stay in placement until the age of 21, with the agreement of the foster carers. During 2018, 8 fostering families gained approval as Continuing Carers and 5 young people decided to stay with their foster carers in Continuing Care. Although the Service recognises this is in the best interest of young people who are settled in placement, it limits availability among foster carers who offer teenage placements.
- 10.3 Of those young people, who chose not to remain with their foster carers in Continuing Care, **5** young people returned home to their family of origin; all were 16 years of age. **3** young people moved to live in supported accommodation; two were 16 years old and 1 was 19 years old. **2** young people moved into their own tenancy; both were 19 years old.
- 10.4 In 2018, 2 fostering families with a temporary category of approval were approved to offer permanent placements to children who had been placed on a temporary basis (3 children in total). 1 Fostering Family adopted a child who had been placed with them on a temporary basis. Although these outcomes are positive for the children, they limit foster carer availability for other children.
- 10.5 Currently 15 children are experiencing significant delay in progressing plans to permanence, and are being cared for in temporary placements. This reduces the capacity of the Service to respond appropriately to demands for placements.
- 10.6 There are an increasing number of children who have a complexity of need who are difficult to place in foster care. Children with limited educational provision and extreme behaviours can be challenging to integrate into family life: some children need to be the only child in a household which is difficult for the Service to provide; others quickly demonstrate that they cannot manage the intensity of family relationships. Historically, this would be noted among older teenagers, however the Service is finding placement requests made for much younger children with such matching considerations that their needs can only be met by an extremely limited pool of very skilled foster carers.
- 10.7 During 2018, **16** placements were purchased from Voluntary Organisations working in Scotland. These placements were needed at times when the Service had no available carers who could meet the needs of children who required fostering placements. During searches of Voluntary Organisations, the Service has noted limited or no placement availability in the Aberdeenshire area, with a few children being placed as far away as the Central Belt. Traditionally placements for teenagers, siblings and children with disability are more difficult to resource, but during 2018 it became evident that Voluntary Organisations were also experiencing significant difficulties in the recruitment of all foster carers.

11 Achievements

Fostering is a positive experience for young people who require to be cared for away from their birth families.

The Service are proud to report that 4 young people were accepted on to University degree courses during 2018 and at least 6 young people began college courses. All remain living with their foster carers.

Feedback from our young people is intrinsic to our Service and improvement. We have received permission to share the following quotes to highlight the experiences of our care experienced young people.

'I want to continue living with my foster carer because I am part of that family.'
(12-year-old)

'I am Cared about, looked after properly, rules are reasonable. Plenty freedom.' (17-year-old)

'They're nice, they take me places'. (12)

"I feel that my relationship with my foster carers is fully natural. I have enjoyed every second with them as they have provided a safe and stable environment for me over the years. They have never failed to meet my needs as they have ensured that I have had a decent education and a good social life. They have encouraged me to reach the best of my ability." (17 year old)

"I have a good relationship with my foster carers and like living there because I can tell them about things that worry me." (14 year old)

'She (foster carer) believed in me when no one did, not even myself.' (15 year old)

12 Inspection by the Care Inspectorate

- 12.1 The Fostering Service is inspected annually by the Care Inspectorate.
- 12.2 The Agency was last inspected in February 2017 against National Care Standards for Fostering and Family Placement agencies in Scotland.
- 12.3 Quality of care and support & quality of staffing were the two themes inspected in 2017, with the Authority graded at 5 in both themes.
- 12.4 Grading reflects performance of the Service in these areas. The Care Inspectorate Grading structure is as follows;
- | | | | |
|---|-----------|---|----------------|
| 6 | Excellent | 3 | Average |
| 5 | Very Good | 2 | Weak |
| 4 | Good | 1 | Unsatisfactory |
- 12.5 The Care Inspectorate introduced a new **Duty of Candour** in April 2018, where all health, social work and care services must by law produce a report on the specific steps taken to carry out their duty of candour when a serious adverse event

happens. The report should include information about the learning involved in such incidents.

- 12.6 All Fostering workers have read the guidance and completed an online e-learning module on the new duty, to help staff understand their obligations under the legislation e.g. they will need to let the people affected know, offer to meet with them and apologise.
- 12.7 There have been no specific adverse events to report under the Duty of Candour during 2018.

13 Service Priorities for 2019

- 13.1 To continue to embed the new placement descriptors for categories of approval and age bands across the Service.

These include a change in terms from:

Temporary, Respite and Permanent Carers for an agreed age range to:

Short Term, Interim, Longer Term, Emergency and Permanent as required by the Scottish Government.

In Aberdeenshire, in consultation with foster carers, we have also amended our age bands for approval to:

0 to 6 years, 5 to 12 years, 11 to 18 years.

Carers can be approved for one, two or all three bands depending on their skills and experience.

- 13.2 Continue to embed new National Care Standards which came into effect 1 April 2018.
- 13.3 Monitor and review the current process around fostering reviews, streamline paperwork and timescales with a view to reducing duplication and unnecessary drift.
- 13.4 Update and implement Aberdeenshire Council's Smoking Policy for Foster Carers and Adoptive Parents.
- 13.5 Embed GIRFEC principles of monitoring outcomes for children and young people and develop strategies to achieve this routinely, e.g. Wellbeing Web, ACE indicators & tools (Adverse Childhood Experiences.)
- 13.6 Implement, monitor and review Continuing Care agreements and the 16+ Finance scheme.
- 13.7 Work with Foster Carers and colleagues to review and update the Foster Carer Agreement.
- 13.8 Monitor and review the existing arrangements for and use of Out of Hours Emergency Service Emergency Foster Carers.

- 13.9 Update the Service's existing policies and procedures available electronically on Aberdeenshire Council website's Fostering page
- 13.10 Continue to develop participation opportunities for foster carers and their families.
- 13.11 Continue to develop participation opportunities for care experienced young people to participate in foster carer training, recruitment and service improvement.
- 13.12 Facilitate 3 joint fostering improvement days per year.

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