

Title: **Fostering Service Annual Report 2017/2018**

Meeting: **Policy Development and Decision Group**

Wards Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

On: **4th February 2019**

Contact Officer: **Adrian Wells**
☎ Telephone: **01803 207195**
✉ E.mail: **adrian.wells@torbay.gov.uk**

1. Key points and Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the performance of the Torbay Fostering Service during 2017/18 and includes information on the;
- Structure;
 - Numbers of Children Looked After (CLA);
 - Foster Carer recruitment.
- 1.2 The report also notes the outcome of the June 2018 Ofsted Inspection which made specific comments about the service.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 This is the Annual Report of the Torbay Fostering Service and covers the period of April 2017 – March 2018. The report that predates this was submitted in 2017 prior to the latest Ofsted Inspection and it had been the intention from that report that all succeeding reports would be published to meet the annual reporting framework. The delay in submission of this report has been due to the need for further reflection following the inspection. From April 2019 it is the intention to publish an annual report in line with other reporting frameworks.

3. Role of the Fostering Service

- 3.1 The Fostering Service is responsible for meeting 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.

3.2 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 model 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 mentioned above to enable them to engage in training and support alongside other foster carers.

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

3.4 The priorities of the Fostering Service are to ensure that;

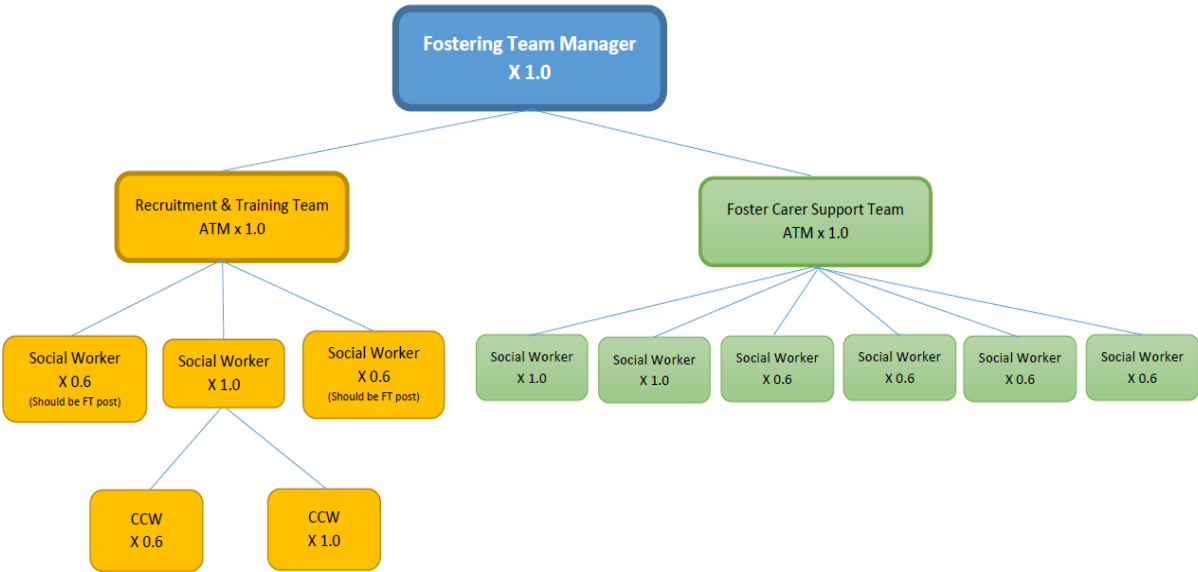
- All children who come into care have an experience of safe, secure and consistent care
- All children experience a safe place within which they can play, grow and thrive, being supported to reach their full potential.
- Ensure the holistic needs of any child are addressed and supported through health,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

3.5 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.

4. Service Structure

4.1 During 2017/2018 Torbay's Fostering Service was managed under the Head of Service for Specialist Services with responsibility as the Ofsted registered

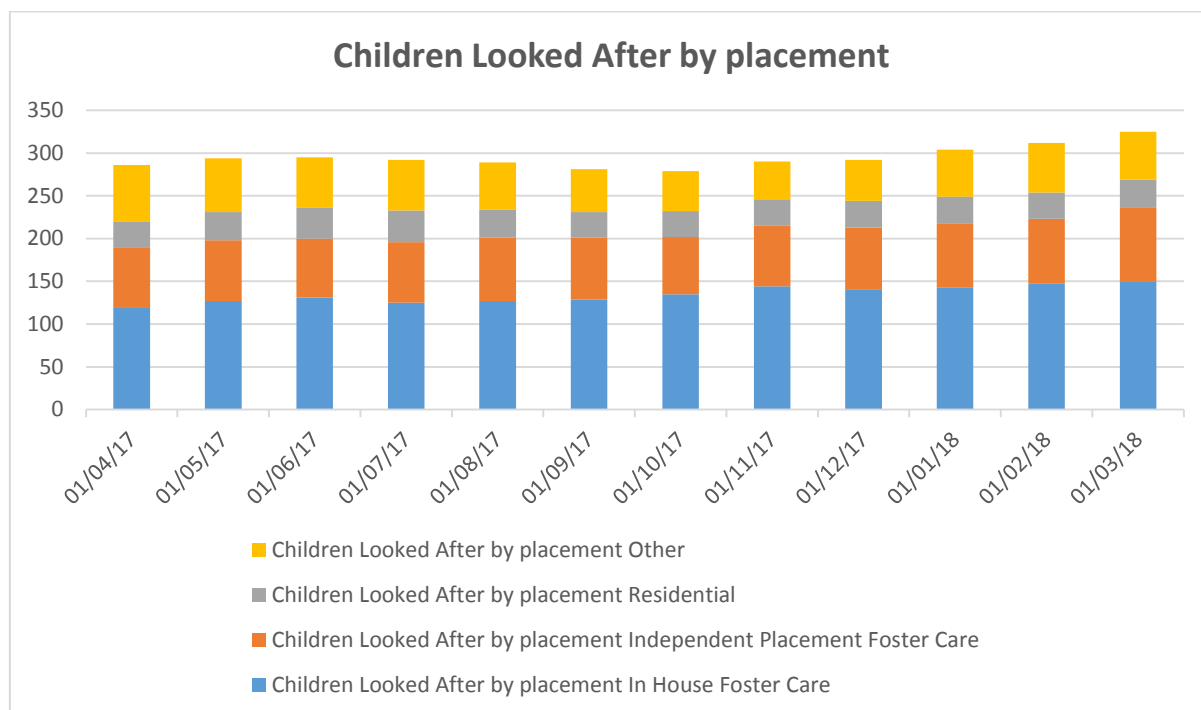
fostering manager. There was also an operational Interim Team Manager with responsibility for this service.



4.2 The Interim Team Manager was responsible for the overall service, including the quality assurance of reports to the fostering panel linking with the agency advisor. Further members of staff included two Assistant Team managers with defined areas of responsibility and who offer supervision and line management to staff within the team. 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.

5. Children Looked After

5.1 The number of children looked after at the end of March 2018 was 325 equating to a rate of 129 children and young people per 10,000 population. As a comparison at the end of March 2017 the number of children looked after was 284, this equated to a rate of 114 per 10,000 population.



Children Looked After by Placement

Month ending	Total Fostered		Residential		Other ¹		Total Residential and Other		Total
	Number	% CLA	Number	% CLA	Number	% CLA	Number	% CLA	
30/04/17	189	66.08	31	10.84	66	23.08	97	33.92	286
31/05/17	198	67.35	33	11.22	63	21.43	96	32.65	294
30/06/17	200	67.80	36	12.2	59	20.00	95	32.20	295
31/07/17	196	67.12	37	12.67	59	20.21	96	32.88	292
31/08/17	201	69.55	33	11.42	55	19.03	88	30.45	289
30/09/17	201	71.53	30	10.68	50	17.79	80	28.47	281
31/10/17	202	72.40	30	10.75	47	16.85	77	27.60	279
30/11/17	215	74.14	31	10.69	44	15.17	75	25.86	290
31/12/17	213	72.95	31	10.62	48	16.44	79	27.05	292
31/01/18	218	71.71	31	10.20	55	18.09	86	28.29	304
28/02/18	223	71.47	31	9.94	58	18.59	89	28.53	312
31/03/18	236	72.62	33	10.15	56	17.23	89	27.38	325

5.2 As can be seen the number of CLA has risen over the year by a total of 39 or by 14%, the detailed data for fostering is included below;

In house and Independent Foster Placements

Month ending	In House Foster Care		Independent Foster Care		Total Fostered
	Number	%	Number	%	
30/04/2017	120	63.49	69	36.51	189
31/05/2017	127	64.14	71	35.86	198
30/06/2017	131	65.50	69	34.50	200
31/07/2017	125	63.78	71	36.22	196
31/08/2017	127	63.18	74	36.82	201
30/09/2017	129	64.18	72	35.82	201
31/10/2017	135	66.83	67	33.17	202
30/11/2017	144	66.98	71	33.02	215
31/12/2017	141	66.20	72	33.80	213
31/01/2018	143	65.60	75	34.40	218

¹Key: Other =Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation

28/02/2018	147	65.92	76	34.08	223
31/03/2018	150	63.56	86	36.44	236

5.3 The proportion of children fostered within in house placements has remained relatively steady throughout the year at 65% +/- 2. The number of children fostered has however risen by a total of 47 or by 24.9%, this has resulted in an additional 30 in house placements in March 2018 compared to April 2017 and an additional 17 placements in Independent Sector provision over the same period.

6. Recruitment Performance

6.1 The number of enquiries received for fostering in the period 2017-2018 is lower than required, this combined with the reduction in approvals is creating challenges in matching, choice and availability for in house placements.

Years	Number of enquiries	Approvals	Conversion % of enquiries to approvals
2014 - 2015	118	29	24
2015 - 2016	65	10	15
2016 - 2017	42	3	7
2017 - 2018	56	5	9

7. Numbers of Foster Carers

7.1 The numbers of carers has been declining year on year since 2014 - 2015. The marketing strategy introduced at that time to address this was the implementation of one pay rate of £400 per child, this proved successful with a high increase of carers moving across from Independent Fostering Agencies.

7.2 Following this the recruitment strategy and marketing was focused on recruiting 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.

7.3 As noted in the report of December 2016, following a review of sufficiency Torbay adopted a new skills based fostering allowance in May 2016. The period following this was a difficult time with a loss of confidence by 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.

8. Recruitment and Marketing Strategy and Campaign:

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

8.2 The key change to the recruitment strategy was to ensure the promotion of interest in fostering in general and not a focused age or specific target group for the first stage of the campaign. The important message was to reflect within the 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.

- 8.3 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 current foster carers with their presence being planned at the information events which were scheduled throughout the Foster Care Fortnight dates in May 2017.

9. Review of progress since the December 2017 report

- 9.1 During this period there was continued focus upon practice improvement. However in June 2018 an Ofsted Inspection found significant regulatory weaknesses within the Fostering Service. Whilst the Inspection is out of timescale for this report it is important to acknowledge the main findings below as they provide an external analysis of performance in preceding months;

- Performance data is not fully developed for all service areas. Only recently, has performance data for the fostering service been collated that shows significant concerns around practice. A third of carers have not had an annual review, a large number have not had an updated medical check and half of the carers have not completed their training, support and development standards. This demonstrates failure to understand a significant service area, poor management grip to ensure regulatory compliance and lack of attention on how foster carers can best meet the needs of children;
- Although foster carers provide stable homes for children where their needs are well met, there are serious weaknesses in the fostering service. There are a significant number of foster carers with no up-to-date annual review, health assessment or completion of training, support and development standards. The local authority cannot be fully assured of the quality of care being provided, although inspectors did not see any detriment to children;
- Most children who are looked after in Torbay enjoy supportive and stable placements with foster families. Where appropriate, children live with their brothers and sisters and do not move placement unless it is in their interests to do so;
- There are insufficient local foster carers to meet rising demand, and more children looked after are having to live too far away from their families. In May 2018, 27% of children looked after were placed more than 20 miles from home. The local authority is not meeting its target to recruit 10 additional fostering households each year. However, most children looked after at a distance from home are in appropriate placements where their identified needs are being met. All children are visited and have regular reviews, PEPs and health assessments.
- The fostering service in Torbay is failing to meet its regulatory requirements. Until very recently, there has been no performance information available to the team manager to assist her tracking of the team’s work. An action plan is now in place to address the relevant shortcomings, and a new permanent manager

has been appointed to oversee its implementation. However, at present there are a significant number of carers for whom there is no up-to-date annual review or health assessment, and half have not completed all their training, support and development standards. The local authority cannot be fully assured of the quality of care being provided to its children. However, inspectors did not see any evidence of detriment to children placed. (Recommendation)

- Some parts of the fostering service are working well. Foster carers appreciate the support, communication and advice offered by their fostering social workers. Carers benefit from a wide range of support groups and training activities, in particular the CAMHS support group offering valuable help in supporting the care of children who have complex emotional and behavioural needs. Groups are arranged at various times to facilitate carers' involvement and peer support. Recent training in therapeutic fostering and 'Fostering Changes' behavioural management have been highly valued by carers.

10. Conclusion

10.1 The Ofsted Inspection Report of June 2018 provides a clear analysis of the weaknesses within the Fostering Service. These are being addressed and the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2018 – 2019 will provide in detail the service response to address the practice issues identified, this report will be published to meet the annual report cycle in May 2019. Supporting this will be a revised Fostering Sufficiency Strategy and a supporting Recruitment Strategy, both of these documents will be published in February 2019 with a view to addressing the capacity issues within the in house service.

Anne Osborne
Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding

Appendices

None

Documents available in members' rooms

None

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:

- Ofsted Inspection June 2018
- Childrens Service Performance Information